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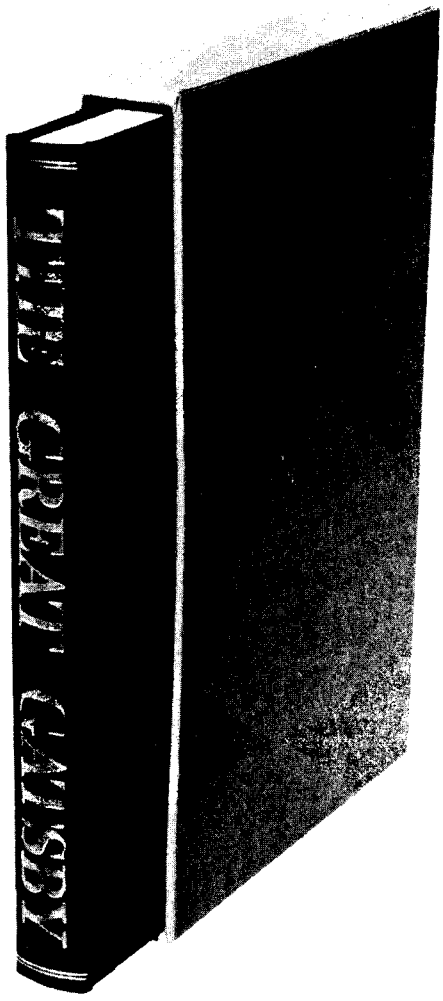

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THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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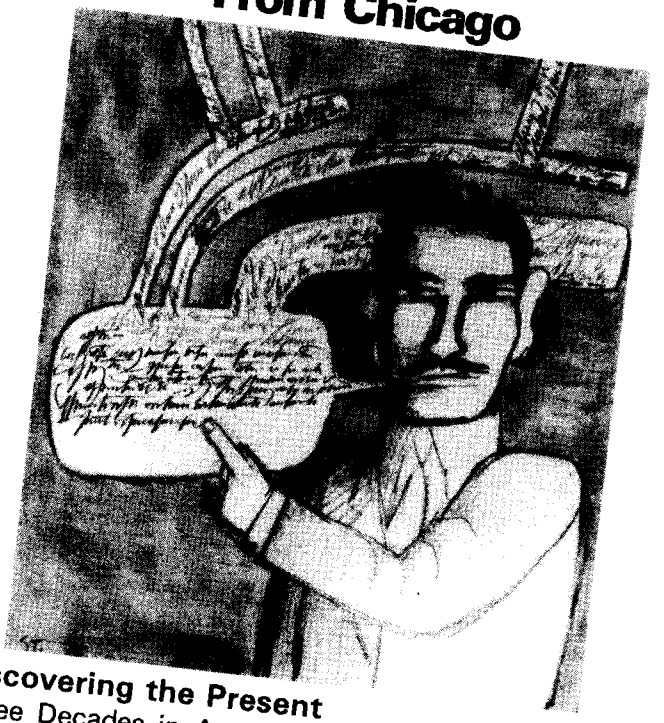

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The Despairing Optimist . . . . . .

RENÉ DUBOS

The present essay marks the beginning of the fourth year of my column in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR—a suitable occasion on which to retrace the steps that led me to entitle it "The Despairing Optimist."

As I shall mention later, I now realize that I have been a despairing optimist from the time of my youth, but I did not become conscious of this fact until a few years ago. If my memory serves me right, the awareness of my fundamental optimism began when I read the article in which Alvin Toffler introduced for the first time the expression "future shock"; this was in 1965, a few years before Toffler fully documented his theme in the famous book by the same title. I immediately had ambiguous feelings about Toffler's thesis that "in the three short decades between now and the twenty-first century, millions of ordinary, psychologically normal people will face an abrupt collision with the future" and that they are likely to be "overwhelmed by change." On the one hand, I recognized the approximate accuracy of most of the factual details that Toffler had accumulated in support of his thesis, and I agreed with him also that painful difficulties are bound to arise from our collision with tomorrow. But on the other hand, I did not believe that the transformations of human life during the next three decades would be as drastic as he predicted. Furthermore, I knew that mankind had repeatedly survived in the past ordeals at least as severe and as socially upsetting as the ones it is likely to experience during the rest of this century. I shall limit myself here to a few statements concerning this last point—namely that there is really nothing new in future shock except for the felicitous expression.

In 1575, four centuries *before* the phrase "future shock" had become popular, there was published in Paris a small book in which the author also worried about the social disturbances caused by the new knowledge and technologies of his time, and about what was in store for the future. The time was of course the Renaissance, and the author was Louis Le Roy, a sixteenth-century scholar and jurist so wise and learned that he was then referred to as the French Plato.

In his book, *De la Vicissitude ou Variété des Choses dans l'Univers,* Le Roy presented the history—as he saw it— of technological developments since the beginnings of time, in an effort to prove that each period had made a contribution of its own to man's understanding and control of nature. But his main concern seems to have been the effects that the new learning and inventions were having on human life during his own time and would have in the future. Le Roy's *Vicissitude* must have struck a sensitive nerve when it appeared, as judged from the fact that the book was reprinted six times in Paris between 1575 and 1584, and was translated into Italian and English respectively in 1592 and 1594. The English title was *Of the Interchangeable Course*

✪ In a *New York Times* review of RENÉ DUBOS's recent book, *A God Within,* Walter Arnold wrote, "If there is still a question what to call Professor Dubos, 'philosopher of earth' would be exact."

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and Variety of Things in the Whole World.

Le Roy was indeed witnessing exciting events. The Renaissance had brought about profound changes in religious beliefs and in social patterns—changes that gave reason for both hope and despair. The invention of the mariner's compass had made it possible to discover new lands beyond the oceans and had brought distant regions near. The voyages of the great navigators and the geographical discoveries of the time were fully as exciting as our ability to fly around the world and our space travels. But Le Roy was disturbed by the knowledge that contact with new populations had exposed the explorers to new kinds of diseases. Syphilis had spread like a conflagration throughout Europe after 1492, as if introduced from the West Indies by Columbus's crew. Furthermore, its prevalence and that of other venereal diseases was increased by the general relaxation of sexual mores and by the mass movements of armies and people at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Other social changes were resulting from the fact that the printing press had made new information and ideas widely available. This had generated social crises throughout Europe by creating confusion in the beliefs of the people. The ancient loyalties that had bound the social order until then were breaking down under the impact of the new enlightenment, the intellectual freedom, and especially the religious conflicts. And to make things worse, the introduction of gunpowder and firearms had rendered all ancient weapons obsolete; wars had become more deadly and more destructive of property.

LeRoy had therefore good reasons to believe that an era of darkness and perhaps of self-destruction might be at hand. Despairing of his times, he exclaimed, "All is pell-mell, confounded, nothing goes as it should." But despite all these upheavals and new threats, he remained optimistic about the future. He believed in particular that the advances in transportation and communications would make it possible for "all mortals to exchange their goods among themselves" and help each other "as inhabitants of one world commonwealth." What we now call "one world" or "spaceship earth" appeared to him a likely consequence of advances in knowledge and technology. Le Roy was truly a *despairing optimist,* and it seems in fact that the events that followed the upheavals of the sixteenth century have on the whole justified his optimism.

Like almost everybody else, I used to believe that the social problems of our times are qualitatively different from those of the past because changes in the ways of life and in the environment are now occurring much more rapidly and are far more pervasive than used to be the case. Since the future is arriving everywhere so fast and since the ancient mechanisms of adaptation can no longer operate effectively —or so the belief goes—we are bound to suffer more acutely from future shock than did our ancestors. But I now realize that the belief in an accelerated rate of change is largely an expression on our part of conceit or of ignorance of history. It comes from the illusion that we are more adventurous and more inventive than our predecessors, and thus are creating situations for which there is no precedent. A simple cure for this conceit is to take a large dose of history. In my opinion, the truth is that time and time again in the past, the human condition has changed more drastically and more suddenly than we can expect it to change during the next one hundred years. I shall limit my illustrations of this statement to a few facts of recent history.

Whenever I worry about the present rate of political or social change, for example, I take comfort from the knowledge that only twenty-five years elapsed between the Fall of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, and the Battle of Waterloo on June 18, 1815 —twenty-five years that truly shook the world of Europeans, and eventually the rest of the world as well. As to rate of technological changes, it also gives me comfort to remember that half a century sufficed, between 1850 and 1900, to introduce into daily life railroads, steamships, electricity, photography, the telephone, wireless communication and most of the

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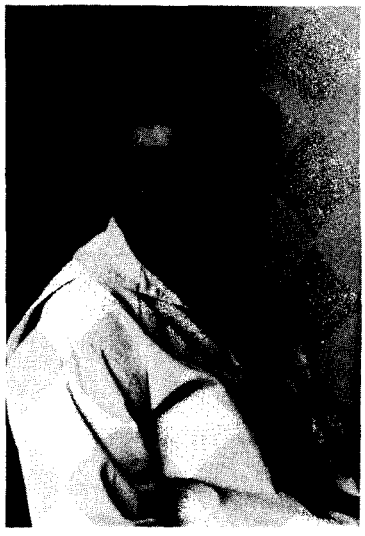

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modern technologies that we now take for granted—let alone antisepsis, vaccinations, anesthesia, radiography and all the techniques that have revolutionized medical and surgical practices. Need I add that we have witnessed during the present century Lindbergh's first nonstop transatlantic flight and the first moon landings, the seven days that shook the world of the Russian czar and his muzhiks, the revolution that transformed the China of the mandarins with their long braids into that of Mao Tse Tung's short-haired communitarian society.

I know that it is dangerous to engage in prophecies. But I am willing to wager nevertheless that the coming decades will not see any technologies so spectacularly new as those that have emerged so far from the Industrial Revolution, any feats of exploration so exciting as those that resulted in air and space travel, any political changes so world-shaking as those that brought to an end in a few decades the colonial empires of the white race. If there is any such thing as the shock of the future, it happened in the past.

We shall continue to experience of course many technological, social and political changes. But I am inclined to believe that their directions will be different from the present ones. The changes to come might be focused on efforts to recognize and satisfy the really fundamental needs of humanity—those that we have inherited biologically from our Stone Age ancestors. In this regard the yearnings of the various forms of countercultures for the "communes," the "open road" and for tribal life, seem significant trends, perhaps illustrated by the reprinting of Ortega y Gasset's *Meditations on Hunting*. The most important problems of the future may be, not how to tolerate without excessive shock new esoteric technologies, but rather how to live in a decently and conservatively modern world, while satisfying those needs of human nature that are unchangeable because they have been irrevocably woven into our genetic structure during our evolutionary past.

I readily acknowledge that there are many good reasons to be pessimistic. Repeatedly in the past, societies have committed themselves to courses that eventually led to their destruction; and this will probably be the fate of our own society if it remains obsessed as it is today with the production of more power and more things. As a scientist, I despair at seeing experimental science—one of the sanest and most powerful instruments ever devised by the human mind—used for purposes that are the epitome of human folly. Yet I remain an optimist because I believe that there is still time for Western civilization to change its course and to refocus its efforts on goals that are socially desirable. There are hints of such a change, of course, in the soul-searching now going on among scientists and technologists.

I must acknowledge that my optimism may be based in part at least on feelings that are not entirely rational, yet influence me profoundly because they have their origin in tragedies—national, familial, and personal—that I experienced during my formative years in France. From these experiences I learned very early that persons and societies can recover from many ordeals and later become fairly successful. This awareness has helped me to maintain an equilibrium between despair and hope. I do not remember the plot of Maupassant's story, *Une Vie*, but I have never forgotten that it ends with the statement that life is never quite so good as one would like it to be, nor quite so bad as one fears it to be.

I have an enormous faith in the resiliency of human beings and of natural systems. Indeed, I take great pleasure in watching people and places rebound after a disaster. On several occasions in this column I have reported examples of the rapid recovery of nature from ecological degradation. To the examples I have already quoted I can now add that last spring shad and other valuable fish had once more become abundant in the Hudson River near my home, thanks to partial control of water pollution.

I am impressed in particular by the ability of human beings and of whole civilizations to change the course of their

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social trends, to start on new ventures, and often to take advantage of apparently hopeless situations for developing entirely novel formulas of life. This is what Carl Sandburg had in mind when he wrote in *The People, Yes!* that he was "credulous about the destiny of man." I also agree with Kenneth Boulding that

> Man is a nuisance, Man's a crackpot
> But only Man can hit the jackpot.

In any case, I believe that optimism is essential for action and constitutes the only attitude compatible with sanity. As the French historian Élie Halévy wrote to one of his friends in 1895, "pessimism is nothing but a state of mind, whereas optimism is a system, the finest and the most philosophical invention of the human mind." Optimism is a creative philosophical attitude, because it encourages taking advantage of personal and social crises for the development of novel and more sensible ways of life.

In Rain

ROBERT WICKLESS

In rain, dark gets darker.
Tree trunks black with watercolor
shades; all leaves grow deep.

And so with sidewalks, streets.
Old objects re-invent themselves,
are magnified, brought clear again.

What I know well, I know depends
on water, and familiar things:

How trees grow foreign, deepening,
and all wet objects stand dark, yet steady,
as they travel deep in the midst of things.

✪ ROBERT WICKLESS received a major scholarship for continued study from the National Society for Arts and Letters and is currently teaching in the Poets-in-the-Schools program in Maryland.

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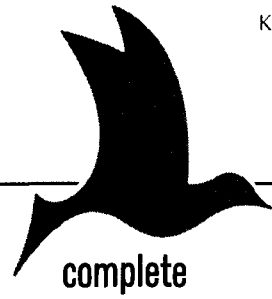

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The Silent Complicity at Watergate

HOWARD F. STEIN

IN HIS PAPER, "DOSTOEVSKY AND PARRICIDE," Sigmund Freud made the following observation about the murder in *The Brothers Karamazov:* "It is a matter of indifference who actually committed the crime; psychology is only concerned to know who desired it emotionally and who welcomed it when it was done." This insight, I contend, has deep implications for our understanding of the national emotional climate in which the Watergate and Ellsberg break-ins, et cetera, were not only possible but likely. The question of individual guilt or innocence, with its own set of cultural meanings, will be a matter of months or years of adjudication. But to focus on individual culpability is to be constrained by our set of cultural blinders that prevents us from perceiving the wider context in which crime and punishment occur, a context in which they differentiate out as symptomatic of fundamental cultural conflicts. In *Weimar Culture,* Peter Gay notes that the avalanche of studies of adolescence during the Weimar Republic reflected a fixation on the very phenomena that the social scientists were attempting to understand, thus largely defeating their efforts. The note equally applies to any effort to analyze the cast of characters in the Watergate affair. To be fixated on a single aspect of a problem is to be part of the problem, not the solution (or resolution).

Before turning to the problem explicit in my title, let me suggest a further clue to the emotional climate that allowed and encouraged Watergate-type activities. In *The Pursuit of Loneli-*

✪ HOWARD F. STEIN is assistant professor of anthropology at Meharry Medical College. Much of the discussion in this article is based on ethnographic research supported by the Maurice Falk Medical Fund and a monograph that arose from work Mr. Stein did for a conference on "All in the Family," at the Institute of Human Relations.

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ness, Philip Slater wrote in a footnote a brilliant analysis of the assassinations of the liberal and radical leaders of the 1960s:

> Many of the assassinations of recent years—the two Kennedys, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X—may be understood . . . as triggered by a sense of latent community approval. Probably there is always a sizable pool of potential assassins—men disturbed and desperate enough both to kill a public figure and to run a very high risk of capture. When a rash of assassinations occurs we must assume that the threshold between fantasy and action has been lowered somehow—that some restraining pressure has been removed. . . . Not that the act is suggested to the assassin—it is rather that the constraining atmosphere that might have prevented his seriously entertaining the idea in the case of a conservative leader is lacking in the case of one who himself represents a challenge to established ways. In the anger and hate of older people around him the assassin finds a fertile soil in which the idea can grow instead of being extinguished.

The question of *threshold* and *unconscious complicity* or *tacit approval* is precisely the key to the *Zeitgeist* that encourages and condones what otherwise would be consciously disavowed. One can, I submit, learn more about Watergate by inquiring into the *Gestalt,* or field, out of which it differentiates as object.

I begin by retracing our steps back to the 1972 presidential election. Consider how each party presented itself: The resounding voice of Mama Cass singing "There's a new world comin'," accompanying the film at the opening of the Democratic National Convention versus the *dulce et decorum,* business-as-usual atmosphere at the Republican National Convention, encapsulated by the phrase, Richard Nixon—Four More Years. The reformative, protestant spirit of the Democratic convention (although abounding in *backstage* political traditionalism) contrasted starkly with the aura of order and staging that typified the Republican convention. Each, however, practiced its own brand of exclusion, radical or conservative: the Democrats brought in masses of new elites and excluded older ones; the Republicans, although giving the impression of greater inclusion, kept the ancient lines pretty much intact.

With Mr. Nixon's overwhelming popular and electoral college victory (sixty-one percent to thirty-seven percent in the popular

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vote, McGovern carrying only Massachusetts and Washington, D.C. in the electoral college), the pan-regional appeal of the Nixon-Agnew ticket suggests a widespread ideology of *status quo* rather than radical social change. McGovern's appeal for a "come-home America," whose revitalization would have radically altered socio-economic and cultural priorities, was rejected in favor of the assumption that nothing was so wrong with America that it could not be righted within the current social structure. Paradoxically, behind the seeming openness and permissiveness of the McGovern position lay a severity and moralistic integrity that amounted almost to neo-puritanism, whose very consistency (despite accusations of indecision and wishy-washiness) repelled those who were seeking an overt law and order but who needed the tacit approval of the breach as well. What some accuse as being corruption, dishonesty and secrecy in government are the very qualities that resonated with the electorate, whose own contradictoriness between outer pronouncement and inner conflict was thus confirmed and legitimated. Thus, for instance, Vice-President Spiro Agnew, a belligerent champion of law and order, vehemently condemned B. F. Skinner's recent book, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity,* as violating everything that America stands for, while supporting repressive legislation that would counteract the very permissiveness that Skinner vilifies.

McGovern's error, if it can be called such, was an open contradictoriness, which contrasted with the Nixon-Agnew covert contradictoriness, allowing the Republican ticket to present a flawless, coherent front. On the one hand, McGovern was associated with the radical liberalism and libertinism of "abortion, amnesty, and acid"; on the other hand, McGovern's austere, unctuously earnest style and sermonizing speeches projected an equally radical puritanism. If it can be said that McGovern was defeated either because he represented standards that were too demanding or projected an utter lack of standards, it could also be suggested that Nixon won because of a tacit approval of the double standard.

In a sense, Nixon appealed to the contemporary contradictions in the "right" way, while McGovern appealed to them in the "wrong" way. Thus the paradox of Nixon winning the Catholic

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vote, while McGovern, the religious zealot of God and country, is associated with atheistic immoralists of the New Left, and is pictured as an anti-Christ who must not be allowed to occupy and desecrate the high places of the chief executive. The contradictoriness of a warrior Quaker is acceptable, but that of a Pauline liberal is not. The apocalyptic arrogance of the New Left repelled the voters, and it seemed to be precisely the ideological populism of the Center and the Right that attracted them to the Republican ticket. If the McGovernites were shouting, "Come home, America," the Nixonites, quite satisfied that America was home (and hence not lost and in need of finding a home), retorted with their own slogan: "America—love it or leave it."

The Nixon emphasis on law and order and the individualistic work ethic (as Archie Bunker says, "Them that works eats.") projected an ideological forcefulness, appealing to current fears and offering an all-out campaign to assuage them. Although both candidates vowed to root out evil from American society, the depth of McGovern's moralism—even asceticism—frightened an electorate who felt that he meant business—that he would not merely combat the symptoms, but would revitalize society so that these evils would no longer exist. This very absolutism threatened the electorate's need both for the perpetuation of these evils and for the endless fight against them (as in the war on drugs, which President Nixon has called the major epidemic of our times: for Nixon, drugs themselves are the problem—and the solution, methadone maintenance, is the substitution of one dependency for another; while for McGovern, society is the problem). To deal with *underlying* issues would have directly implicated the electorate themselves, which they avoid by splitting off unconscious needs from overt ideology (for example, by having delinquents do their acting out for them) and by evoking an idealized American past that serves as a pillar of strength. Not moral absolutism but moral mendicancy in leadership is what an equivocating electorate needs to maintain the stability of its way of life. Ultimately, what was sought and what was preserved through this election, is a stern veneer and a corrupt core, so that one can get away with as much as possible, while righteously punishing those who get away with too much too openly. The sins of commission must be made on

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the sly, secretly or vicariously, while the exhortations to decency are made in the piety of public places.

In an address on October 12, 1972, to the National Press Club, playwright Arthur Miller described the emotional climate of contemporary America with such terms as "defensiveness," "caution," "suspiciousness," "fearfulness," "no confidence in themselves," "impotence about influencing the ongoing machine," "hopelessness," "discouraged," and the feeling that "nothing can be made better." With respect to the presidential campaign between President Nixon and Senator McGovern, he despaired that the electorate hasn't the "self-confidence to vote its hopes, but votes its fears." What the people want is "a man who issues warnings," not the "permissiveness" they perceive in McGovern. The people are "blindly suspicious," hence their elective affinity for Nixon. Noting the lack of popular outrage against the Russian wheat deal or the bugging of the Democratic National Headquarters, he spoke of "the need for larceny," our need to have someone else "do our dirty work for us," that in turn produces a "contempt for the democratic process." Comparing Nixon's bid for reelection with the revelation that McGovern's first running mate, Senator Thomas Eagleton, had undergone psychiatric treatment, he commented that the people "could trust a man who is corrupt, but could not trust a man who knew despair." Hence the resonance of the voting public with the personality of President Nixon and his even more outspoken vice-president.

More recently, during the Watergate hearings, on July 27, 1973, Senator Lowell Weicker, a member of the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Practices, spoke to the National Press Club on the subject of the hearings. He contrasted our present obsession with order, safety and quiet, with what he considers to be the true American way of life: the sharing of troubles and the free spirit. Attempting to explain how the Watergate and associated horrors were possible, he said (I quote from my notes): "After the turmoil of the 1960s, we wanted quiet. We got our quiet. But we had to pay a price." Part of that price is the cynicism, lack of caring, and the failure to involve ourselves that prevails not merely in politics, but throughout our culture.

A vital stream that is the lifeblood of our national climate is

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the need to combat an opposition, and if an opposition does not exist, to invent one to do combat with. It is a clear pattern in President Nixon's career that he thrives on opposition; he relishes a fight, a struggle, a battle, an enemy to defeat. Despite protestations to the contrary, it seems clear from the Watergate hearings that the officials of the White House and the reelection committees likewise reveled in opposition. Violence, demonstrations, civil disruption and obscenity were the very ingredients that the Nixon presidency and presidential campaign needed to justify itself. They reveled in opposition even as they arranged the overwhelming smashing of this opposition, making certain that the media were present to witness and record these shameless exhibitions of lawlessness that were affronts to all law-abiding citizens. Not only did they condemn the opposition, but to make their point even more strongly, they staged, planned, and were impresario for demonstrations and violence that would seem to have originated from the "other side." The abortive planned bombing of the Brookings Institute, the retrieval of documents, and the casting of blame on the Democrats, et cetera, has more than clumsy analogy to link it with the National Socialist tactics of burning the Reichstag and placing the blame on the Communists. "Order" and "chaos" are dialectic symbionts, not opposites.

When the defenders of law and order came out fighting, whom were they fighting? If depth psychology can contribute anything to our understanding of political process, it can serve to remind us that we combat our inner enemies in the outer world: we fight in this outer world an enemy that we have externalized and now seek to exorcise. We purge ourselves through opposition to our enemies. The enemy is ourselves—the essential blur between Left and Right, anarchy and order and the like, renders transparent the dichotomization between them (the poet and critic Peter Viereck has spent a lifetime studying this dialectic). Whether or not we clinically choose to label "paranoid" the constellation of projective phenomena, what is clear is that those who compile lists of enemies have a deep affinity for those enemies. If the law has been subverted and perverted, then its undermining has been encouraged.

Martin Luther, in his "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the

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Romans," made some salient observations to this point, addressing the righteously indignant judge of his time—and ours.

> [quoting St. Paul] ". . . in judging others, you condemn yourselves, since you do the very things which you condemn." It is as if he were to say, To outward appearance, you observe the law, condemning those who do not observe it, and being quick to teach one and all. You see the splinter in the other man's eye, but are unaware of the timber in your own. . . . The logical conclusion is that, in the depths of your heart, you hate the law. What is the use of teaching others not to steal if you are a thief at heart yourself and, if you dared, would be one in fact? . . . It follows that, if you teach others, but not your own selves, you do not know what you teach, and have not rightly understood the nature of the law. Nay, the law increases your guilt, as Paul says in chapter 5. A man only hates the law more, the more it demands what he cannot perform.

As Erik Erikson documented in *Young Man Luther,* his historic analysand and protagonist was a psychologist of considerable powers. With our Freudian vocabulary, we can speak of ambivalence toward introjects, criminality out of a sense of guilt and so forth. But let us be more concrete. Adults abdicate the responsibility and limitations of maturity, parenthood and age, and narcissistically identify with the innocence or potency (as the case may be) of childhood and youth as a means of denial and vicarious accomplishment. The Save the Children Federation solicits contributions with the motto: If children are to save the world, then we must first save the children. Childhood and youth are states of adult veneration, idolatry and envy. But if children are to be saved, and not merely preserved, then there must first exist "saved" adults.

In their effort to break out—often desperately and radically—from beneath the oppressive contradictions of parents (and their educative successors in the schools and universities) who ambivalently transgressed their parenthood, the young, trying to wrest some integrity from their conflict-ridden lives, frequently define themselves in utter opposition to whatever their parents stood for. Thus, as the child analyst E. James Anthony observes in *Parenthood:* "Society gets the type of adolescent it expects and deserves."

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Similarly evocative is the title of Nicholas Von Hoffman's book on the hippie movement: *We Are the People Our Parents Warned Us Against*. It is clear from the content that a subtitle might be: "But Seduced Us into Becoming." Hence this self-definition-in-opposition is what Erikson called "the choice of the negative identity." What of the adults' side of the chasm? The child psychiatrist Eveoleen Rexford writes: "The demands for strict punishment of aggressive and destructive behavior mingle with provocations to delinquency and indifferent or punitive correctional systems. . . . It appears sometimes that our society needs its delinquents who act out impulses which the adults do not or cannot and then requires that the youth be viewed with indignation and censure."

At a different level of analysis, William Jovanovich has captured the quality of this opposition in his essay, "Imagine the Present," in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR (Winter, 1972/73). He writes: "The turbulence of living in the United States today is described by Milovan Djilas, the Yugoslav dissenter, as 'the madness of liberty.' If it is not madness, then it is a terrible riskiness. What we seem to be doing is testing to the furthest limit the public safety against an individual's safety, and, in the effort, risking both." The "madness," I submit, is the irrational nature of the riskiness, the unreasoned reasons for testing both individual freedom and the law to the breaking point.

Those who are uncertain about their own identity (inclusive of values, roles, self-image, sexuality, et cetera) cannot bestow upon the next generation a secure identity. All that they can transmit is their own bewilderment, self-doubt, ambivalence, paralysis and moralism, generating in their children monumental self-hate as well as hatred for parents who transgress what they preached—or at least seemed to be preaching. These children, in turn, vacillate spasmodically between hoping to find their place and fearing (while also seeking) that they will be put in their place, looking for objects of identification better than their parents—and worse.

In ideology, parents may be ardent liberals, but in action, die-hard standpatters; conversely, conservative parents may privately indulge in what they publicly rebuke; finally, permissive parents, many acting more like adolescents than adults, may never have taught their children the meaning of "no," only to resent later

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their children's independence and insolence, condemning them for being what they had been groomed for. The (mutual) testing from childhood through adolescence often threatens to consume all in one enormous conflagration. Yet there is more to it than the self-immolation of nihilism and the eroticized sadomasochistic demand for control and to be controlled. For those willing to notice the person amid the conflicts, the testing is equally an attempt to force those who have been evasively ambivalent to state their position once and for all; a search not merely for authority, but legitimate, trustworthy authority, one that can believe and trust *itself;* a quest not merely for regressive dependency, but for someone who can genuinely be depended upon. Only when an identity seems condemned to a dead end of closure, where every future is a re-experiencing of the past, do nihilism and manic extremism harden into repudiation as a style of life, one that forestalls utter emptiness as it directs boundless rage outward. It is this latter that lies at the core of the dynamics of the so-called generation gap, a gap that, incidentally, works both ways.

The new generation commits all the sins—and more—that its parents had committed, and subsequently denied and atoned for. The older generation then looks with bewilderment and horror on how such a generation of monsters (vipers?) could have been produced by such upstanding and diligent parents. The parental generation then wholly denies its own complicity in this process, and projects all of the trouble outside: bad influences, permissiveness, communists, liberals, hippies, Negroes, Dr. Spock, intellectuals and the like. Yet these same parents had dared their children to act out what they could only achieve vicariously, and subsequently punished them for this violation when in fact, the children were only "doing their duty."

While the virulence and rhetoric of the polarization capture our attention, we go far astray if we fail to notice the many links between the two sides of the ideological abyss, in fact, *the systematic nature of the opposition.* Enter: Archie Bunker and family, caricature and reflection of Everyman, white, middle America. It is not merely that the Archies and Ediths of the world identify with their protagonists; but the children of the Archies and Ediths—deeply mistrustful of, and confused by, parents who are

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utterly contradictory, arbitrary and ambivalent—look to Gloria and Mike as their representatives in good standing, in loyal opposition to all that Archie and Edith stand for. Furthermore, both sides of the vigilantly defended generation gap do not merely oppose each other; rather, they need each other for their very opposition. The weekly television serial, "All in the Family," is a dramatization of a whole way of life—of two generations that can neither live with nor live without each other, that must be emphatically different from, yet cannot separate from, one another. The tactics of confrontation, symmetrical escalation and entrenchment provide both for the perpetuation and equilibration of conflict. The dialectic of polarization makes for the stability and the equilibrium of the family system. Each person in the system defines himself and herself by the opposition (the instance, the condition of Mike being right is that Archie simultaneously be wrong, and conversely).

If, in the Bunker household, the generational conflict and dyadic alliances are the foundation of a dynamic equilibrium, each agent must be seen as not merely self-acting, but also, in the perspective of the total family, as acting out certain parts for a specific "other." Those negative aspects of oneself that can neither be fully repressed nor acted upon are split off and localized in some other member of the family system, who does all of one's acting out, but at a safe enough distance so that it can be simultaneously retained yet remain ego-alien. Furthermore, one possesses an uncanny adeptness in identifying in the most minute detail the other's faults, yet protests complete innocence when accused of contributing to the problem. Wholeness thus resides in the family system, of which each person is a vital part. As attested to by the wide engagement of American audiences, the conflicts within Archie Bunker's household are archetypal conflicts of contemporary American society.

Archie speaks most poignantly to the situation and dilemma of the working middle-class American of moderate income, modest educational attainments, but most importantly, thwarted and threatened mobility aspirations. Here the white ethnic American constitutes a great portion of Archie's constituency. With Archie, ethnic Americans have identified with the American dream and

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the possibility of realizing it. For many, Archie is their hero (although he is not ethnic), voicing the hopes and dreams that America personified. But they identify also with Archie as victim, as they themselves are, disillusioned by the slowness, if not impossibility, of realizing that dream (namely, assimilation into the melting pot). They share with Archie a common life situation, a denominator that crosscuts cultural and religious distinctions. Archie and ethnic Everyman are equally the little man, the underdog, the child who has never been able or encouraged to develop, a tool (or peasant) to work someone else's machinery, one who in his powerlessness lashes out in impotent rage against threats to his tenuous security.

If a sense of mastery and competence in the world is necessary for a well-rooted security, then none of these "Everymen," ethnic or not, has a basis for such security. In his powerlessness, Archie invokes the cultural ideal, sitting passively in his womblike chair slurping his beer and angrily stereotyping everyone in sight—putting each in his place in order that some room be left for Archie himself. In actuality, the real Archie Bunkers of the world feel that they are hardly masters of anything, and hence the pathos of their arbitrary tyranny at home, which is more a refuge than a castle. Archie's only strategy is retreat—and regression—trying to hold on to what little he has left, lashing out as he draws back. But the farthest he draws back is his home, his fortress, and his ragged throne. For one with increasingly less *Lebensraum,* territoriality takes on comic and pathetic proportions. Archie may try to fool everyone around him into believing that he is a victor, in command of his life—and everyone else's; but in his heart, and transparent to everyone else, he is a hapless victim who must look to the Richard Nixons and John Waynes for unwavering guidance and steadfast sense of purpose.

As Archie identifies with John Wayne, the autocrat who tames the West, so President Nixon, another in Archie's pantheon, identifies with General George Patton, the decisive autocrat in the service of democracy. When the film *Patton* was made in the late 1960s, President Nixon brought it to the White House, basking in the singular boldness and daring of this seemingly self-made man. A man who had overwhelmingly overcome his own feelings of

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inferiority to become a military hero became an object of veneration for a generation that feels increasingly helpless to influence much of anything. Fondly remembering Patton, they could remember that they once were men. Archie's devotion to President Nixon lies more in what Nixon *evokes* than what he is—his president, who had made it at long last, up from obscurity and inferiority, from weakness to strength, forever sniffing out and snuffing out communism, yet a man whose very effectiveness in the labyrinthine bureaucracy was limited, evoking both sympathy and adulation. Having been able finally to come out from behind (and beneath) the shadow of that benign father figure, Dwight Eisenhower, Nixon emerged as a most vengeful father in his own right, lusting after a law and order with which the real Archies could identify, having traced a not too dissimilar itinerary in their own lives. Hence the justification of totalitarian means for democratic ends. The ambivalences of the age of anxiety are resolved by the creation through new myth and ritual of an age of innocence, the age of narcissism, "where seldom is heard a discouraging word."

Those who secretly or openly cheer Archie on know of his impotence, his desperation for control, and they hold on the same way he does, holding on so defiantly, so desperately, that they may need, as does Archie, six ounces of prune juice at breakfast in order to let go of anything. With the world (inner and outer) slipping more and more out of their grasp and control, they take increasingly desperate steps to wrest back the control that has been taken away, or to protect that which they fear will be alienated. From out of this desperation they resort to virtually any tactics to assure safety, security and quiet. They padlock everything in sight, but can never be secure because the ultimate enemy and antagonist lies within and provides constant reminders in the night. Whether one speaks of the inviolability of the home, the security of the neighborhood, or national security, or the security of the free world, the meanings remain essentially the same; only the *scale* is different. This is why, by knowing Archie Bunker, one can understand why Watergate was not only possible, but tacitly condoned and endorsed.

Subversion of the law, lawlessness, secret circumvention of the law—all in the name of law and order—are tactics that Archie

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Bunker keeps in his daily repertory, overt and covert. And when *he* is caught, he resorts either to denial or rationalization. We witnessed many Watergates long before the real one happened. The cynicism that abounds toward politics, whose taproots lie in a sense of betrayal and disillusionment with respect to the American dream, is reflected in the response, "They all do it." Yet this cynicism toward politicians obscures the cynicism of everyday life toward one's own everyday deeds: "We all do it—if we can get away with it, even though we really shouldn't." Denying one's own corruption, one projects it upon the world and is thereby cleansed of the gnawing guilt.

The Watergate hearings themselves are something of a cleansing agent, a cathartic melodrama, a real "All in the Family," showing how deeply the radicalism and counterconspiracy of the Right and Center is bound up with the radicalism and conspiracy of the Left. Exceeding the popularity of the soap operas that the hearings usurp, they offer yet another family with which to identify and project selectively—and, in all likelihood, provide a (symbolic) catharsis that prevents political engagement and change, thus preserving the *status quo*. One is a distant, although engaged (and disengaged) onlooker.

Politicians are expected to be inherently corrupt, but at least appear proper and virtuous. When corruptness and corruptibility become too overt, there is a public outcry for justice, or rather, for the sham to be restored. Only when there is *complete* disillusionment and demoralization (for example, during the Weimar Republic) do guilt, shame and rage combine in an identity crisis to demand a totalistic house cleaning and purge. Our crisis has not reached these proportions; we are still satisfied with equivocators and have not yet demanded demagogues. That is why Haldeman and Ehrlichman, Mitchell and Stans, LaRue and Mardian, are disliked and disbelieved. Ehrlichman especially; for he unabashedly, shamelessly, holds in contempt and absolutely expendable all ideals, laws and civilities in order to achieve ends that are compatible with his (and Nixon's) definition of security, national and domestic. What Americans in their consciences are struggling with, Ehrlichman and associates were totally unscrupulous about: issues were a matter of expedience, not conscience; his moraliza-

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tion is a transparent *post facto* rationalization. While most middle Americans are ambivalent toward the law, the White House elite were openly disdainful toward the law, at best expressing their disdain behind the scenes, violating what they pretended to uphold. This is more than the American public wishes to identify itself with, to have as part of its self-image: opportunists contemptuous of any standards, openly practicing what dearly held ideals condemn, dangerously flouting everything "American."

If these are the villains of Watergate, then one might speculate that the young, boyish, penitent, prodigal Dean, Magruder and Strachan are at least in part heroes. Trapped and condemned by the doings of their "fathers," they are forgivable. On the senatorial side, the dashing Baker, the stern Inouye, the dogged Talmadge, the brusque Weicker, and the biblical Ervin are heroes in dogged pursuit of truth, justice and the American way. The swashbuckling antiheroes of Watergate are those characters whose daring and resourcefulness give them an aura of secret excitement and attraction, even though in terms of other American ideals they should be villains: namely, the master plumbers Hunt and Liddy, those rugged individualists, flamboyant, establishmentarian outlaws, carrying out a "mission impossible." Finally, completing the cast is the self-christened fool, policeman Ulasewicz, whose testimony provided comic relief by virtue of his nonchalant, almost innocent, recitation of facts and events that would take a Kafka to imagine. Ulasewicz's disarming humor notwithstanding, Watergate and the hearings remind us that Kafka's world is very much with us, and we endanger all democratic process if we view it as a fiction that is played out only on television.

EPILOGUE: I would like, finally, to address myself to an ultimate social concern awakened by Watergate: that without pyramids of power, Watergate would have been impossible. These pyramids, of late, have taken on truly pharonic proportions. There is no doubt that they have their precursors from the days of Camelot and its best and brightest, but the building of Valhalla is of recent vintage. Unlike his predecessors, President Nixon is not referred to—nor does he refer to himself—by name, but by *office:* The President. The occupant *is* the office. His conspicuous absences

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from public view, his condescensions for a public or congressional audience, and his seemingly all-encompassing claims to "inherent rights" in the presidency (for example, impounding of monies, executive privilege) all lend credence to the caricature of Nixon as king: indeed, *rex tremendae majestatis!* Following Henry Kissinger's nomination for secretary of state, reporters jokingly asked him how he wished to be addressed. Kissinger, that mysterious amalgam of Metternich and Bismarck, quipped with a disarming smile: "You can just call me Excellency!"

Perhaps counting on their zeal to exceed their judgment, President Nixon surrounded himself with a fiercely loyal court, responsible and answerable only to himself, a secret society that undertook assignments that the visible government could not or would not do. Several white ethnic Americans whom I interviewed in 1971 forcefully told me that what this country needs is a man like Hitler to get rid of crime and drugs, who would put hippies and blacks in their places, and who would clean up the country and get everything in order. A similar statement was made by a Polish-German woman in her fifties, who had lived in Nazi Germany: "I voted for Nixon because he had Germans—Kissinger—run the government. Germans really know how to keep order. One thing you could say for Hitler was that he kept order in Germany." The error of the White House elite, it seems, was not so much that they committed crimes (although in some they clearly went too far), but *how* they committed them.

Nixon's pyramid of power, then, would seem to be quite broadly based. The question, though, is whether we want pyramids or bridges. If it is bridges that we want, then we cannot expect a pharaoh to build them, for pharaohs can think only in terms of pyramids. One can build only in terms of what one can imagine—in the pharaoh's case, vertically. A pharonic society is pyramidal not only in its social order and its edifices erected by leaders to do themselves homage as gods, but also in its lineal and hierarchical conception of time. Pyramidal time is dynastic time, harnessing generations to its marching orders. If we seek the construction of bridges, then we must look to a concept other than the pharonic to guide us. This is why Watergate, a barometer of our cultural climate, reflects far more than a constitutional

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crisis: it raises questions that go to the heart of the American ethos. It expresses a fundamental polarity of values that has been a dialectic of American history since the arrival (or rather, the *emi*gration) of the first settlers: lineal authority versus individualism. Bridge building is the great mediator between these two contenders, reducing their cutting edge, permeating their inviolability. Genuine interdependence is the guarantor, not the foe, of independence and freedom. Watergate portends profoundly for our national identity, our national culture and our polity because its outcome will be a microcosm of the wider decision: the choice between pyramids and bridges. The choice is decisive; pyramids and bridges are mutually exclusive. If the pyramid is chosen—or rather, reconfirmed—America will still be a prisoner of its history, one extremity of the pendular swing between "law and order" and "freedom." If the bridge is chosen, then indeed we shall have embarked on the "second American Revolution."

Pyramids cannot exist without exploitation—they are monuments to its magnitude. They express the magnitude not only of exploitation, but of *exploitability* as well. The two are inseparable. Exploitability is vulnerability, and the exploited of one generation, given the chance, become the master exploiters of the next generation, vividly remembering their vulnerability, and defending themselves against the possibility of its occurring ever again. With each modicum of success, one vows "Never again!" and prepares massive protection against the encroachment of those whom he fears and exploits. This is Archie Bunker's empty fortress, refuge and prison.

In the view from the bridge, rather than the pyramid, what would be Archie's life chances? He would be less anxious, less fearful of losing what little hold he has on the world (and reality), and less likely to resort to paranoid defenses. He would not need inviolability, because the dangers of violation and exploitation from without and from within would be decreased. Not subjected to divide and rule, he would not need to do likewise in fear for his pitifully small place in the sun. His anxiety would not evaporate (reality is defined by inner as well as outer experience), but with less need for rigidity, Archie could *afford* to become more flexible, more inclusive and more humane. The error of many

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liberal intellectuals, and equally the error of our national leadership, is to assume that middle Americans are exploitable boobs, blundering fools, and "children" in need of guidance. White middle America, like all other stereotyped groups, possesses neither special wisdom nor an inordinate amount of stupidity. If the best in people is appealed to—the potential of what they can become, rather than the certainty of what they are condemned to be—then the fear of the worst will gradually take care of itself. Defenses, when no longer needed, will be discarded (although cautiously).

Perhaps we have been appealing to the "wrong" law all along in our attempts to solve these problems—thus condemning ourselves to failure from the outset. The issues of "separation of powers," "executive privilege," "constitutional mandate," "legal precedence" and the like only obscure the deeper problems. Whether it be the Bible, the Constitution or any other culturally sacred document, one can find a justification and precedence for practically anything. The resolution is at a higher order, a higher logical type, if you will. This is what St. Paul and Martin Luther attempted to get across. The law, or the Law, derives its higher authority from the spirit of the law, the spirit that infuses the law. It is in the light of the spirit that the law is illumined; without this higher valuation, the law is profane and profaned. This is the perspective from which Ellsberg speaks of a "higher patriotism" that led him to release the Pentagon papers. And this is the vantage from which St. Paul and Luther were led to reformulate the nature of the law and to offer a model for the reformation of a society in the midst of convulsive strains.

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Man-Machine Symbiosis and the Evolution of Human Freedom

MICHAEL A. ARBIB

AN INTERESTING FEATURE OF THE ERVIN COMMITTEE'S investigation of the Watergate scandal was the decision to use a computer to codify the mass of conflicting evidence and testimony. Faced with such a mountain of data, a group of human lawyers finds it all too easy to overlook vital pieces of information, or to miss a correlation between passages that are separated by hundreds of pages of testimony. The computer provides the lawyer with an invaluable partner which—if properly programmed—can correlate, sort and retrieve pertinent items with astonishing speed and accuracy.

This is yet another example of our joining with artifacts in that advanced state of physiological interdependence that in the biological world is referred to as *symbiosis*. We build and repair our machines. In return, our watches regulate our temporal behavior, our clothes and houses help control our temperature, cars increase our mobility, ovens vary our diet, and glasses improve our vision. Later in this article, I shall suggest that the lawyer-computer symbiosis of the Ervin committee be extended to a grand symbiosis between human society and computer networks to enable us to mount a global attack on our complex environmental and economic problems. In this first section, however, I wish to explore the more personal symbioses of the kind just mentioned. With the possible exception of cars, whose side effects are becoming more noticeable (we tend to forget the effluent problem of the carriageless horse!), all the above symbioses seem of

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clear benefit. And yet, as the following example shows, there can exist levels of such symbiosis that do encroach upon our concept of human freedom.

Gerald Smith and Burton Ingraham have been reported to suggest that an unremovable electronic device be planted in the head of any parolee, high-risk convict or person on bail. The device would monitor brain activity, which could be sent back to a central computer, which could in turn control the application of electrical stimuli to the subject's brain.

> A parolee with a past record of burglaries is tracked to a downtown shopping district and the physiological data reveal an increased respiration rate, a tension in musculature, and an increased flow of adrenalin. It would be a safe guess, certainly, that he was up to no good. [Or, more likely, that he is frightened of what he expects to happen next.] The computer in this case, weighing the probabilities, would come to a decision and alert the police or parole officer so that they could hasten to the scene; or it could transmit an electrical signal which could block further action by the subject by causing him to forget or abandon his project.

Before we analyze this hideous proposal more carefully, it is important that we avoid the reflex condemnation of technology that has become a fashionable alternative to careful analysis of our current problems. Electronic pacemakers have kept heart patients alive for years, and there is hope that related techniques may serve to control the seizures of *grand mal* epilepsy. Another promising development is that of artificial limbs electronically controlled by the nerves of the amputee. Thus technology, wisely and humanely applied, can use techniques related to brain monitoring and stimulation in ways that are clearly of benefit to the individual to whom they are applied.

Dr. Smith was reported to have maintained that electronic control of prisoners is the cheapest and most effective way to remedy the chronic problems of this country's penal system, its tremendous costs and lack of success in changing people (into his image?). He was reported as confident that by 1985 (why not 1984?) it will be used in an experimental way, and by 1995 in

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a practical way. "If we don't do it, someone else will"—a statement of complete moral bankruptcy.

The oriental despots had a cheaper, simpler, and—I suspect—more effective solution: to lop off the right hand of the thief. This not only reduced his potential for the physical expertise of thievery, but also provided a clear warning to shopkeepers that he was a thief.

I think that we all recoil at the outright barbarity of the amputation of a man's hand—and yet some readers may at first consider the possibility of selective amputation of a man's mind as not such a bad idea. Quite apart from the disturbing overtones of the "guilty if there is a possibility of not being innocent" concept of the Smith-Ingraham proposal, there is a shocking disregard for the side effects. The article that described their proposal also included a report of studies on a monkey named Paddy by José Delgado of Yale. Each time a computer picked up electrical impulses "coming from the area of Paddy's brain correlated with aggressiveness and excitement," a punishing electrical stimulus was sent "to a part of the brain associated with fear and pain." Within two hours impulses coming from the brain's "aggressive area" were down fifty percent. A few days later there were no impulses at all. This change was accompanied by altered behavior—less aggression, diminished appetite, and laziness—which persisted for two weeks. The "cure"—the destruction of Paddy's energy and initiative—seems worse than the "disease"—some aggressive behavior. I must confess, however, that I am unhappy at the simplicity of my reaction to the Smith-Ingraham proposal. Placing a person in jail seems to also violate the rights of that individual—and yet, while the need for prison reform is clear, it would seem naïve to imagine that society could afford to abolish all variants of the prison system. As I shall reiterate, much of our approach to social problems must have this evolutionary character, as we strive to reconcile our notions of justice with social realities and the limits of technology.

What is lacking is a clear sense of justice fully geared to the complexities of twentieth-century life. If the problem is crime, it seems easier to cripple criminals than to rethink society in a

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way that will reduce criminality. It seems allowable to restrict the liberties of more and more individuals if they have proved in some way deviant from the norm. On such premises, totalitarianism easily flourishes, and to avoid it, we must carefully consider what are our rights and obligations as members of society. John Rawls, in his masterly treatise, *A Theory of Justice,* has wielded a deep range of philosophical, economic and legal thought to provide a framework in which just social institutions may grow. His approach demands that the principles of justice be acceptable to a panel of rational people ignorant of their true position in society. This "veil of ignorance" is clearly a mythical creation, but it seems clear that the law will be fairer to the poor if not framed only by the rich; fairer to men if not framed only by women; and fairer to the criminal if not framed only by the self-righteous. The law will be more just if the framer thinks not only of how he may protect his property, but also of his treatment should *he* prove to be the criminal.

On this basis, Rawls argues for two principles of justice: firstly, that "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others" (we may not cripple the liberty of a few in the belief that this will profit the many); and, secondly and subsidiarily, that "social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (*a*) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (*b*) attached to positions and offices open to all" (the president of I.T.T. should not receive over $800,000 per year unless so gross an economic inequality can be shown to enable him to direct the corporation for the greater public good).

These are but the rough first statements of the principles, and Rawls takes many pages to delimit their finer nuances, and to consider how they might be applied in real situations. My point here is not to argue that there exists a ready-made set of laws to govern the humane use of technology, but rather to emphasize that a thorough investigation is required to steer between the Scylla of blind adoption of all technical innovations and the Charybdis of out-of-hand rejection of the aid that technology can provide in helping us to stabilize an increasingly complex society.

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In our world of three (or is it already four?) billion people, we cannot be free to have five children when our numbers press past the stage of ecological balance; nor can we make war to gratify our chauvinism; nor can companies profit without heed of social cost. Freedom, then, involves striking a balance between the individual's need to act and the constraints of living within a society —which poses the delicate question (so topical as the American bicentennial approaches) of when a citizen may rebel against the restraints of society, and when a society may crush that rebellion.

Having used the question of electrical stimulation of the brain to raise problems of the just use of technology and having stressed the problems raised by the increasing complexity of our world, I suggest that we can construct a worldwide man-machine symbiosis that—properly constrained—may let us create a just human society fully tuned both to the proper uses of technology and to the world's complexity. Before doing so, however, I wish to introduce a number of useful conceptual tools, and to say something about computer networks.

The conceptual tools I would bring to bear on the problem are those of *cybernetics*. In his 1948 book, *Cybernetics,* which first brought the subject to the public attention, Norbert Wiener defined cybernetics as the study of control and communication in the animal and the machine—viewing animals as information-processing systems, rather than the heat engines of metabolism studies. Today, many authors define cybernetics in their own idiosyncratic way, but for our present discussion we may view cybernetics as having evolved into a general study of information processing (communication, control and computation) in complex systems, be they computer networks, human beings or societies. (I thus do not distinguish cybernetics from general system theory in the sense of Ludwig von Bertalanffy in his *Robots, Man and Minds.* An excellent early account of the cybernetic approach to political science is given by Karl Deutsch in *The Nerves of Government.*)

As a paradigm of the cybernetic system, consider the scheme shown in figure 1*a*. We see that the organism *communicates* with

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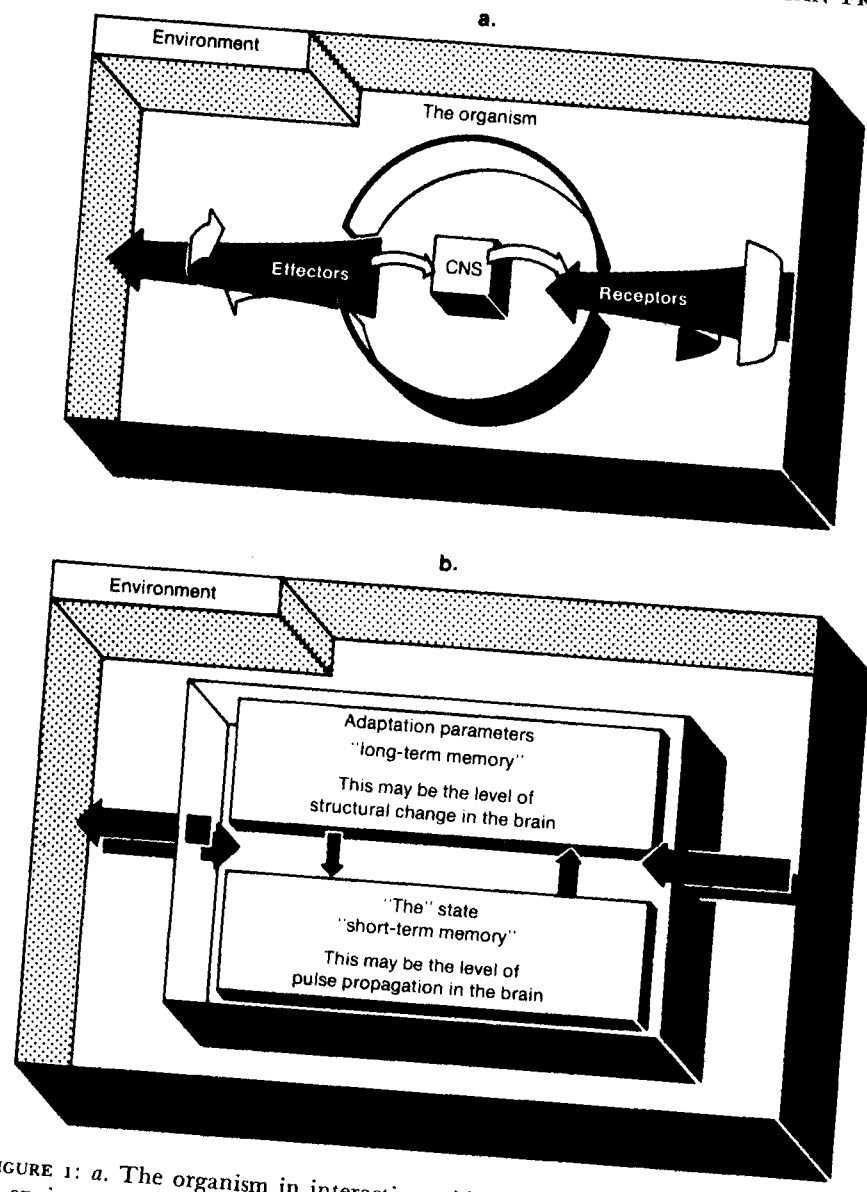

FIGURE 1: *a.* The organism in interaction with its environment: receptor responses to environmental energies and feedback signals from the effectors modify activity in the CNS (central nervous system) which, among other things, controls the effectors that express the activity of the organism.

b. A functional decomposition of an adaptive system into two levels of "long-term memory" and "short-term memory." (These illustrations are adapted from ones in Mr. Arbib's *The Metaphorical Brain*, and appear here with the permission of the publisher, Wiley-Interscience.)

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its world via receptors and effectors. Both internal and external communication pathways are important, too, in providing feedback messages as to how successfully a task is moving toward completion. The CNS (central nervous system) can *compute* whether or not corrective action must be taken if it is to effectively *control* its effectors. To make this more vivid, consider the situation in which you (the organism) are trying to catch a mosquito (an infuriating part of your world). The receptors through which you receive information about the position of the mosquito are contained in your eyes and ears (and, if you are unlucky, in your skin as well); the effectors whereby you wish to control the mosquito are in your arm and hand, with their appropriate muscles. The task of your brain is to interpret the signals from eyes, ears and skin to compute the correct pattern of electrical activity in your spinal cord that will yield the appropriate muscular activity. Your skin provides clear feedback if the computation and control are unsuccessful!

In figure 1*b*, we stress that the organism does not always respond to a given stimulus in the same way, but makes use of information about its current situation (a short-term "model" of its world—"Where am I?" "What am I doing?") and about the general properties of its world (a long-term "model"—"How have I learned to handle this sort of situation in the past?"). Thus, computation is as much directed to updating these "models" ("What can I learn from this mess?") as it is to controlling the current behavior of the organism ("What do I do next?"). For example, you may—returning to that wretched mosquito—respond to the provocation not by swatting at it but, based on prior experience (your "long-term model of the world") of lack of manual coordination, by reaching for some lethal spray. Moreover, in trying out different sprays on different occasions, you may come to concentrate more on learning ways of obtaining a good night's sleep during the mosquito season ("updating your internal model of the world") than on relief from the individual mosquito that provides your current "input."

In analyzing systems of the kind shown in figure 1, cybernetics have learned how to compute the effects of feedback

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on stability and how to achieve patterns of behavior that are in some sense "best" (the optimization problem). But they have also learned the need to simplify a complex system if they are in any sense to understand it, and they recognize that the simplification may still be too complex to unravel without the aid of computers. Thus, while cybernetics may be the science that best serves to help us study the interrelation of many parts in a complex whole, and how to change those interrelations to yield improved overall behavior, it is a science in its infancy. There is no simple feedback formula or optimization rule that can be "plugged in" to tell us "how the brain works" or magically solve society's problems. It took three hundred years to move from Newton's detailing of the physics of getting to the moon to the engineering reality of that great leap for mankind! Our cybernetics is still far less refined a tool than Newtonian physics, and the problems to be solved grow more intense. In particular, when we turn from the organism to society, it becomes painfully clear that we need theoretical advances, more sophisticated computing equipment, and far better information about the impact of various types of legislation if we are to solve social problems. (A crude, controversial, but nonetheless interesting, beginning has been sketched by D. H. Meadows, et al. in *The Limits to Growth.*)

Before tying these ideas back to our discussion of social problems, I should comment briefly on computer networks. Just as telephones are hooked together into a network, so may computers be interconnected so that they may exchange data and programs (sequences of instructions that tell the computer how to process the data). An interesting system of this kind is now in existence as the ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Department of Defense) network, which links the computers of many artificial intelligence laboratories in the United States. It enables a worker in any laboratory on the network to make immediate use of any innovations developed by other workers on the network—even if he is three thousand miles away.

Like any technological innovation, computer networks have great potential for both use and abuse. It is helpful if the computer in a bank in Texas can "talk" to a computer in the bank

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in your hometown in Wisconsin, if this enables you to cash a check immediately instead of being stranded for a day or more while you wire home for the money (a reminder of how useful the telegraph network has been, in its turn). It is harmful if you lose a job because your employer's computer "talks" to the F.B.I.'s data bank and receives an inflated account of past escapades that you have been trying to live down. It seems noteworthy that Senator Sam Ervin has been the chairman for investigations into both data banks and the Watergate scandal, for the juxtaposition of the two reminds us how much of the problem of data banks stems from political abuses rather than the imposition of technology. (When Orson Welles filmed Franz Kafka's *The Trial,* he used the computer to symbolize the bureaucracy. Many people forget that the hideous bureaucracies of which Kafka wrote were of people, not of computers. The computer can enable the impersonal bureaucrat to ignore the public more efficiently, but it can also help the concerned, but harried, bureaucrat cut through his paperwork quickly enough to respond to the individual on the other side of his desk.) Thus, as we extol the virtues of man-machine symbiosis, we shall do so with a nagging awareness of the ability of political man to abuse any system, whether or not it contains machines, and thus we must continually return to the problem of adequate safeguards.

The solutions of social problems are intimately tied to the organizations of government that must implement them. As Stafford Beer has observed in his paper "The Liberty Machine," published in *Cybernetics, Artificial Intelligence and Ecology,* edited by H. W. Robinson and D. E. Knight, "How can you have plans that are not couched in terms of the organization which must implement them? But . . . if the organization is no longer well adapted to the environment, how then can the plans be relevant to existing threats? . . . we expend our resources in the ever more efficient implementation of irrelevant plans."

This point is illustrated by my experiences on a visit to Russia in 1964. Most of us have come to think of "anarchy" as a dirty word in the political lexicon. The moral of my story is

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that there are social problems for which anarchy (not in the fearful sense of bomb-throwing conspirators, but in the literal sense of a "headless," decentralized organization) is the best solution: in Moscow, a limited edition of the telephone book was published many years ago and promptly sold out. Thus, hotel rooms in Moscow (in 1964, at any rate) contained no phone book. The Intourist desk had a phone book, but would not release numbers, although they would place a call for you. It could take several days—asking Intourist to place a call each time you returned to your hotel—before you finally got through to a scientist who had not given you his phone number. When I mentioned the problem to a very pleasant, very brilliant young Moscow mathematician, he sympathized, but told me not to worry, for soon there would be a new bureau to arrange contacts between scientists. He was so conditioned to the formula, "Given a problem, create a centralized organization to solve it," that he could not accept the idea of simply making phone numbers freely available, with the scientist coming to the phone either to make an appointment or to apologize for being booked up. But it seems to me that this is clearly a case in which anarchy in the sense of decentralized communication via the telephone network is far better than a rigid centralized organization.

Of course, while such a form of communication may be termed anarchic, it is important to stress that it can only succeed because of a highly organized substrate. It may or may not require a centralized organization to ensure the health of the telephone network. The important point is that that organization, once having established the channels of communication, does not control the content of the communications in the way that a bureaucracy charged with facilitating scientific contacts would do. In other words, we really need a symbiosis between organization and anarchy. (In fact, an interesting aspect of the success of the Bell Telephone System is that it is heavily research oriented. As we shall see again below, this ties in with our observation on figure 1*b* that "computation" must be directed as much to updating "models of the world" as to controlling the current behavior of the "organism.")

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It happens that anarchic organizations have become increasingly prominent in models of the brain. The reticular formation is a region in the core of the brain stem that, among other things, can switch the organism from sleep to wakefulness, and may play a role in selecting other overall modes of organization such as "fighting," "fleeing," "feeding," et cetera. Different regions of the reticular formation receive different types of sensory input. If a cat is eating a mouse when a dog appears, the region that "attends" most to taste might command "feed," while the region that "attends" to vision might argue hotly for both "fight" and "flee." Although one might imagine an organization in which some overall controller "listens to the advice" of the different regions and commands the new mode of activity, Kilmer and McCulloch have suggested an anarchic model (for an exposition, see section 7.1 of *The Metaphorical Brain*) in which the different regions, or "modules," interact in such a way that they eventually reach consensus as to the appropriate mode. Just as decentralized communication rests on a well-organized telephone network, so does such a system depend on well-specified connections in the brain—as we learn more of neurogenesis (the formation of the brain in the embryo and shortly after birth), we find that more and more of what had seemed hopelessly random networks are indeed intricately patterned arrays whose interconnections are to a great extent genetically determined.

The strategy used by Kilmer and McCulloch may be compared to the cross talk of a panel of physicians diagnosing a patient. Each physician is a specialist but does know a certain amount of general medicine. A heart specialist might base his diagnosis mainly on the electrocardiogram but still be biased by skin pallor and heavy breathing. When a new patient comes up for consideration the physicians (modules) are "globally decoupled" and each independently makes his initial diagnosis. Thereafter, the doctors talk back and forth in an effort to reach agreement, but there can also be "local decoupling" in that if one physician suddenly becomes convinced that a radically different diagnosis is required from the one that he has just been advocating, there would be a period during which the other physicians would pay special at-

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tention to his reasons for changing. Let us now see the implications of these ideas for social organization.

Whether one is a Russian calling for a new bureaucracy, or an American inveighing against socialized medicine, we are all more or less prisoners of the social organization in which we have grown up. If we are to attack that massive complex of interrelated social problems whose symptoms include pollution, overpopulation, warfare, poverty and urban blight, we must conceive of, and then implement, drastically different modes of organization. Stafford Beer has used the Kilmer-McCulloch model of the reticular formation as the starting point for a new mode of social organization that he calls the "liberty machine."

Beer envisions a network of operations rooms, strategically located in relation to the spread of social problems: Mission Control comes down to earth. These rooms would receive real-time data from the systems that they monitor (pollution levels, crimes, production levels, educational achievements, food prices, et cetera), would distill the information content, and would make world projections to serve as the basis for instant decisions from the deployment of police at the scene of a crime on up to changing the exchange rates of international currency. Such a network has three primary virtues: it circumvents the problem of "social habituation" (the way in which people lose the sense of urgency required to attend constantly to the solution of long-range social problems such as the threat of nuclear warfare or overpopulation); it reduces the risk of confusing the symptom with the disease (the computer power in the network allows attention to the interrelation of many different parts); and it encourages liberty (decision-making is based on the free flow of information, rather than on the legislation of some small group of politicians) so long as this very powerful tool is used "only by those elected by the people to govern and by the agencies to which these governors delegate that responsibility." My task in the remainder of this article is to outline some strengths and weaknesses of schemes that, like Beer's "liberty machine," look to symbiosis of government organization with computer networks to solve the immense complexity of our current social problems.

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The "liberty machine" is an anarchic form of government. Each control room can make decisions for its own region, drawing more or less on the experience accumulated at other sites on similar occasions. On the other hand, the various centers can communicate a dazzling array of information at electronic speeds to reach consensus in matters of global or national decision-making (compare the panel of doctors in our discussion of the reticular formation model). Such a system can avoid the insensitivity of a centralized government to regional differences, and can explore in depth a far wider range of alternatives than a conventional House of Representatives. On the other hand, just as a team of doctors, no matter how well schooled in the art of mutual consultation, may still lose their patient if none attends to the crucial symptoms, or if none has access to appropriate drugs or surgical techniques, so is there no guarantee that such a man-machine symbiosis in and of itself will magically yield a stable social system. In the language of figure 1*a*, we may say that no matter how sophisticated its central nervous system (in this case the computer network), an organism will die (the society will break down) if it does not have suitable receptors (data-gathering tools) and effectors (legislative and economic powers).

But, to continue with the analogy with figure 1, it is also true that receptors and effectors are of little use without an effective central nervous system and (recall figure 1*b*) one of the crucial properties of a central nervous system is to learn from experience, updating a "long-term model of the world." Stafford Beer's original proposal contained no provision for such updating: in requiring his "liberty machine" to yield immediate action, he decried the "Let's form a committee, create a director and hand out research grants" response to societal threats which so often yields people dedicated to holding tenure on the committee, rather than to solving the original problem. (Compare George Bernard Shaw's comment on the folly of rewarding a physician only so long as he fails to cure your disease!) Without basic research, however, we often cannot understand the true dimensions of the problem, and have no access to the tools required for its solution. I thus propose that the "instant decision" function of the "liberty ma-

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chine" be augmented by the accumulation of social wisdom, with the operations-rooms network providing both the laboratory and the repository for an evolving science of politics and sociology.

In different parts of the world, at different consoles, there would be socio-cyberneticians of widely differing ideologies. My vision would be that, for the first time, we would have a system so configured that these ideologies could be put to the test: there would be objective information as to how well a Marxist analysis fitted certain data, how well a capitalist scheme could solve labor problems, the relationship between oligarchy and peasantry. A crucial problem is how we ensure that the operators can rise sufficiently above ideology to recognize when a drastically different solution now appears to be appropriate. (It would be worthwhile if the members of the United Nations, instead of reviling each other for adopting different social systems, would instead applaud diversity and cooperate to set up objective studies of the success of different organizations in tackling different problems. Quite apart from the distressingly repressive spirit that now characterizes Czechoslovakia, a great tragedy of the Russian invasion of 1968 was that it crushed a noble experiment in blending socialism, democracy and some aspects of capitalist incentives.)

It is terribly important that we recognize how abysmally ignorant politicians, sociologists and political scientists still are of the dynamics of complex organizations. This means that our network must serve as much to remedy that ignorance as to make immediate decisions. This will always raise the delicate decision of when it is permissible to conduct an "experiment": carrying out actions that do not appear the best possible on the basis of the current "model" of society in the hope of improving that model. To anticipate the question of democracy in the next section, it may well be that, should our network be implemented, voters will have to decide whether they will accept a ten percent drop in their standard of living in the coming year in the hope that the results of an experiment will yield a fifteen percent increase thereafter.

Even if we build a learning capability into our network, we still have the problem of developing criteria by which to guide

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our learning. It was Norbert Wiener himself who was among the first to warn of the dangers of trying to get machines to compute the "best" solution to social problems unless one took great care to work out all the catches in your definition of "best." (The problem is classical: think of all the fairy tales showing how hard it is to state three wishes in a sufficiently foolproof way to ensure a happy ending. Wiener cited "The Monkey's Paw" by W. W. Jacobs.) Suppose, for example, that the United States entrusted its military defense to a computer-controlled network of ballistic and antiballistic missiles; and that the network's overriding priority was "In case of war, minimize the number of square feet damaged." The system could hardly be called a success if the relatively small area of the United States damaged during a war happened to be precisely those square feet on which the citizenry were standing at the time! But let me again stress that this problem is not peculiar to technology. The above fantasy is no more hideous than the wounding and the slaughter of two-thirds of a million young Britishers and Frenchmen in the Battle of the Somme in World War I due to the incompetent decision making of General Haig.

While I claim that the societal problems we now face are so enormous that we cannot solve them without some cybernetic network of man-machine symbiosis, I would also stress that technology provides no magical solution, unless we ensure that the network is operated according to principles that embody a highly refined sense of human justice that is not automatically given by the cybernetic principles of the network's organization (see my discussion of happiness in the Winter 1972/73 issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR; and my discussion earlier in this article of the work of John Rawls).

I shall close by raising (rather than answering) a flurry of questions on the role of democracy in the age of the network. Given the complexity of the cybernetic networks, should we insist that our politicians be cyberneticians and sociologists rather than lawyers? If we must accredit politicians to ensure that they can make decisions about complex organizations, how do we guarantee

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that the certification process is not a process of indoctrination by an existing power group? Will such politicians be able to respond to clear indications of the need for revolutionary changes when they conflict with their own self-interest?

If the operations rooms are not to be highly instrumented versions of the old smoke-filled room, what decisions should be open to public debate and democratic vote? Who decides what data may reach the control rooms? Are your intimacies grist for its mill? What phenomena are to be modeled? When is direct intervention permissible? And who decides the criteria that guide such decisions? The voter? By majority vote? How do we ensure that the voter knows enough to reach his decisions? Can we get him to vote behind Rawls's "veil of ignorance" for the general benefit rather than his own self-interest?

Beer claims to be puzzled by what he calls the total unawareness of government that this tool of great potency could be forged by anyone commanding adequate facilities, who might then, because of his "infinitely superior" decision-making capabilities, take virtual control of matters in complex international affairs. He also indicates the terrible consequences if the Mafia beats the government to building the "liberty machine." This reinforces my point that the "liberty machine" is a failure if it serves only to achieve externally stated ends rather than being so constructed that whatever social consequences it has must be of general benefit. It is not then a "liberty machine," but rather a power-amplifying machine, and so we are back at the problem of how to ensure that the power that is amplified is for human freedom. But, tackling another dimension of Beer's "puzzlement," surely the Rand Corporation is an indication that governments do perceive the power of such systems, and, just as surely, the disclosures related to the Pentagon papers provide dramatic proof that we still don't know how to build such a system to uphold justice effectively.

Finally, the rhetoric of "infinitely superior decision-making capabilities" reminds me of the overblown claims of some cyberneticians who, in the early fifties, talked of building a functioning brain by 1960. But 1960 came and went, and while brain theory makes great strides, we still seem close to the beginning in our

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task of understanding, let alone reproducing, human brains. Surely, our cybernetic network is something we may hope to evolve over a very long period—perhaps millennia. How are we going to gain the perspective that lets us work on such a time scale, while still trying to take relatively effective short-term action? We wish to cure the disease rather than the symptoms, but are still at the stage at which what we take to be the disease itself is really only a complex of symptoms at a somewhat more abstract level. Our task, and it's a mighty one, is to try to pool our diverse ideologies, our increasing technological knowledge of computers and cybernetics, and an evolving sense of what constitutes human freedom so that humans, in symbiosis with their machines, may eventually become truly free.

From an Airplane Porthole

MELVILLE CANE

Golden brilliance on high;
lower,
a flock of sheep
graze biblically
in fields
of blue.

✪ MELVILLE CANE's new miscellany of prose and verse, *The First Firefly,* will be published in January.

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Holiday Highway Deaths Fall Below Record

ROBERT B. HEILMAN

IN THESE DAYS WHEN MORAL INDIGNATION is a harmless source of popular pleasure, one of the favorite sources of moral indignation is "death on the highways." People write letters to the paper about it, editors and television thinkers deliver sermonettes about it, politicians test the air to see whether making it illegal would get votes, and vigorous vigilantes not only invent all sorts of car-borne devices to obstruct it, but demand that car makers put these in right away. With an outpouring of indignation there is always a flux of blame, and we distribute it generously, at least to classes of people to which we do not belong, principally car makers and other drivers. Blaming is very natural to us; it makes us feel better, and I do not mean to come out against it. When blaming is in the air, we need not blame blamers; at most we can see whether their eyesight is good.

If we were to get rid of the old Puritan in us, we might be able to live without the luxury of blame. We could, for instance, take a statistical tack rather popular in America and accept a certain number of highway deaths as inevitable; or we could even boldly regard terminal highway incidents as a rough-hewn euthanasia not without social utility in a world hurrying carelessly toward overpopulation. But blame is rather more satisfying, and truth to tell, it is in one way less a luxury than a necessity: it helps us conceal from ourselves a nagging guilt difficult to ac-

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knowledge. So we blame, for instance, speed, although we can hardly help knowing that speed comes out of some inner impetus that we do not choose to curb or cannot (it appears that the only means of curbing speed is to lack the fuel to keep it up). We blame the men that make the cars that are not perfectly protective wombs when we drive them at speeds that we censure but that our natures seem to make us use. I do not defend the men that make the cars that sometimes turn out to be tombs rather than wombs; maybe safety devices that could be at a zenith have fallen to a nadir. My subject is not other men's objective blameworthiness but our own disposition to blame, since this is in part a way of concealing—again, from ourselves—some complicity that we have in highway problems. Finally, we love to blame other drivers not only for speed but for failures of both competence and gentilesse.

Here our passionate panacea is driver education for all (that is, all others; we ourselves are resentful if, after some detected infraction, we are sentenced to do time in a driver-education class). I do not begrudge any man his panacea; like blame and indignation, it helps allay guilt. This particular panacea puts all its money on technical expertise, and no doubt "know-how" could, or does, render highways less sanguinary than an uninhibited humanity could make them if it went all out. But we have a bit of a problem here: a great many of the more spectacular highway incidents, probably most of them, are due less to faulty know-how than to—what shall we say?—a slip in attitude. Something non-technical is missing. I am really reluctant to do this, but since there seems to be no up-to-date argot for the concept, I have to fall back on an older, perhaps obsolescent term—moral concern. This is something that, unfair as it seems, human beings really have to learn before driving-school age.

I know that "moral concern" is likely to be a pretty misty term to a modern audience, so it may be well to suggest how it could work. With it we might, as drivers, be able to come in second best (or worse), to live with delay, to concede advantages to others, or to bear with their indifference to us; not to drive half-awake, half-bored, half-cocked, half-drunk, half-eaten by emotions, half-ill; to survive without the joy of the gamble, the big

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move in the little space, the weaving half-figure eights across lines and lanes, the showmanship, the flourish, the tour de force, the air of conscious and indifferent mastery, the triumph; the little punishment or the frustration of others by the tail-gate threat, by the unforeseen leap into the intuited hole in an apparently unbroken train of traffic, by the snail's pace in the rabbit run, by staying in a favorite lane regardless of whether what one is doing there is meant to be done there.

All these little fortifications of our egos push against our moral concern if it intrudes upon us; hence conflict, hence discomfort, hence the effort to eradicate it by panaceas, by indignation, and by blame for other people. These are all symptoms of the guilt that I have been mentioning and that it is now time to come to the roots of. It is a guilt that we hardly know we have, and it goes back to a cause that lies beneath the way we drive. That cause, I suggest, is a wholly unconscious conception of what the car means to us and of what we are doing with it. Unknowingly we think of car driving at least in nonmoral, and probably in antimoral, terms. For us a car becomes, not a neutral mechanism of service, like a washing machine or typewriter or desk calculator, but an instrument of power, of conquest, of magical achievement, of Faustian conjuring; it is a projection of the ego—of the ego in its expansiveness, its need of triumph, and probably even its destructiveness (nominally, of course, the destruction of space and the annihilation of time). In the car we become the aggressor, happily without our even thinking about it, which would be unpleasant. We use it as a vehicle for keeping pressure on the opposition and on rivals; with it we free our combative, even our unruly, our antisocial side; we threaten those who get in our way. Our car constantly looks more hostile and sinister: crouching or low-lying, ever closer to going on its belly like the aggressor in Eden; glaring, snarling or hissing, ears laid back, a frightening composite of serpent, dragon, crocodile, and feline ready for the feral spring. Riding this, nay driving it, toward victory, devil take the hindmost, we should rein ourselves in? Rein in when we don't even know that symbolically we are turning loose a gladiator, a flamethrower, a mechanized cavalry charge, a beast of prey, a cobra?

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II

Now this is not news. The car makers have known it for a long time. They play to it. Hence their car names, the authentic, hidden sales pitch, the one that salesmen never need mention. Car names are subliminal entrapments of our secret selves, betrayers of ambition, militancy, libido. The people who want to reduce the number of cars because cars are enemies of well-being would win half their battle if they would try a panacea totally different from the popular favorites: get makers to give cars names that would not appeal, on one hand, to the secret seeker of social and worldly triumph, or, on the other, to the hidden adventurer or raider, the warrior or destroyer, the predator or beast lurking unacknowledged within us. Except for a very few that calmly transmit surnames without detectable powers of incitement, car names send us upward bound, leaping over others into visible worldly glory, or downward bound, yielding to a low growling creature in the cellar of the soul. Some manage to have it both ways. Look at the Thunderbird Landau: what a double betrayer of basic human lusts. On the one hand the threatening animal, this time a high flyer that frightens mortals to death with thunder and lightning, a Luftwaffe of nature; on the other, a graceful and aristocratic carriage, the embodiment of the upper world to which others bow: together, a Göring as Chesterfield, an air force with gentilesse, the id as old family.

The upward-bound names (Detroit's own Equal Opportunity Program) are pretty familiar. They turn us into royal-carriage types with Landaus, Broughams and Sedans (no buggies, gigs, flies and traps as far as I know); this is the world of Regals, Coronets, Marquises, and, just a step or two down but still very solid, Squires (beefsteak, pipe, rifle) (but no Farmers, Hired Hands, Millers, Ploughmen, Delvers, Miners, Longshoremen); in this company we take our ease at traditional *plages*—Calais, Newport, Capri, and, best of all, Riviera, or, for those who mingle the fashionable with a touch of the American democracy, Monterey, Malibu, Catalina (but no Coney Island, Atlantic City, Jones Beach, People's Shore or Cozy Cove); or we join the jet set—Continental, International, and, on the big-time political front, Ambassador (but no East Side, Bowery, Salesman, Ellis

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Island, Minority or Ethnomatic); our business pays off—New Yorker, LTD, El Dorado (you don't get to it in the ghetto; there are no ads for cars called Ghetto, Shanty Town, Small Town, Burg or Crossroads). To seize a couple of these profits in one package deal, the public can go for the Monaco and the Monte Carlo. And what else besides! The big gamble and the cutthroat race (the indoor and outdoor versions of the same plunging spirit)!

For a less high-toned gamble, but still a genuine hazard, there is the Ventura, implicitly lucky of course. But our passions of this kind are much better ministered to by such as Le Mans, Grand Prix and Bonneville. They take us into the no-holds-barred racing realm, where recklessness is essential, aggressiveness is indispensable, and sudden death lurks at every curve. In such inventions we do not straightforwardly travel to a destination; rather we practice conquest by speed. Now the names are beginning to dig into the depths and find the old unsentimental competitor lurking within us, hoping to run over everybody else. Yet depths plus heights, paradoxically: we can get so elevated that we do not need to keep our feet on the ground at all (that base need of lesser humanity)—with a Comet, Satellite, Vega or Galaxie: megaspeeds and no ceiling, the universe to range in and look down on others from. If we go for the victory of pure speed, Mach 1 may be our dish; if we want to combine it with other superiorities, there is the Mercury—a divine travel agent, weighty but lightning-like, traveling around the sun four times as fast as our own hurrying earth, and so elusive that we can never put a finger on it. Whee.

Speed is only one of the ways of getting ahead of others; we can do it on earth as well as in space. There is the Triumph, for instance, which means that there have to be some losers around. The Imperial gives us power over an empire, that is to say, a lot of territory snatched from lesser fry. Then there is the simple ultimate power to command: that of the Fiat, the Let-It-Be-Done car. One of the indispensable agents of empire is the officer whom we might call "the man with Fiat"—the Centurion, who ruled a hundred men as they overran the victims of the greatest empire the world has ever known. If we shift from classical to medieval aggression, we come across Le Baron—a pugnacious sort of nobleman wanting to be a law unto himself and systematically having

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at other barons and the king. He made his victims bite the dust; we tell ours, "Eat my dust." Hence the Duster, which might be the ecological car that cleans things up, but is more likely the battler that dusts 'em off, whether as a tough cop or as a threatening pug. Closest to our hearts are such go-it-alone figures who, whether slyly or fiercely, take on others or even "the system" (hence no car has ever been named the System). The Rogue may be a rascal or scoundrel or felon (as in "rogues' gallery")—a troublesome or even thievish fellow on the roads. While the rogue, although untrustworthy, is sometimes genial, the Gremlin is in origin an "ill-humored little fellow," the ornery underhanded disturber who makes things go wrong for others. Then there's the fellow who just doesn't like the way things go, the Challenger; he wants confrontations, preferably the ultimate one of the duel. Allied to him is the automatic nonconformist, the Maverick; to him the rules of the road are so many conventions that interfere with his freedom to be himself. Sometimes this anticonventionalist harbors a secret love of a very conventional satisfaction, that is, acquisition or even the snatch: so we have the Maverick Grabber, a wonderful image of Mr. Have-It-Both-Ways. This dual nature may split in either of two directions, with corresponding intensifications. Take the nonconformist a little further, and you have the Rebel, whose ego needs to tear down not only conventions but laws too: *la loi, c'est moi.* Or take the acquisitor a little further, make him the man who wants it without delay or red tape, and you have the Marauder, one who roams for plunder. But we can do still better than this: maximize the marauding spirit, and you come up with the archetypal roamer-plunderer, the grabber of souls, the Demon. With such a slave we ought to be able to turn loose upon the world our most savage longings.

Yet these can be articulated in more direct ways. A name with little evasiveness and great integrity is the Matador, literally, the Killer; here we are getting down to the real heart of nonconformity. The matador-type appears, too, in certain individuals with the true automobilist spirit. One of these is Pontiac—a militant and sanguinary warrior. There is still more embracing truth in Electra, that fierce girl who could not rest until she had hotted up her brother to kill their mother, who had killed their

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father, who had killed his daughter as a sacrifice to raise a sea-wind needed to drive a fleet by which to pursue a war of extermination. Here we have not only the chain reaction familiar in highway history, but a sort of ultimate desperado spirit of the revengeful car driver.

The Matador, Pontiac, Electra—all give us images of merciless knife-wielding. We have moved from hell-raising, rebellion and robbery to bloodlust. Many cars are baptized into the blood brotherhood of lethal weapons. The Dart is a long slender missile with a pointed shaft at the end. The Javelin is a spear that can be used to kill animals or men. The Cutlass is a short, heavy, curved sword used in naval battles; with it we become marines boarding a hostile craft and hacking the defenders to ribbons. Le Sabre is a heavy one-edged sword "especially used by cavalry." We pick up more destructive power in the Corvette, which is a kind of warship; and Corvair perhaps adds a warming dash of savagery by a centaurish union of a warship with a corsair or pirate—the navy itself as freebooter.

We can release our secret selves not only through human types and machinery but through the world of nature. No need to ask which nature: it is the nature red in tooth and claw that is our alter ego in the nonhuman domain. To gratify the beast in our own subbasement we can find submarine monsters, surface predators and aerial aggressors. Among underwater uglies there is the Manta, that is, the devilfish, whose very name must strike terror. Then there is the Stingray, with a barbed tail "capable of inflicting severe wounds." Still better is the Barracuda, a hyper-toothy type, which not only is predacious but may be toxic. One evolutionary step, and we become threats in the air. The Falcon is a bird of prey appropriately "taking its quarry as it moves," and the Thunderbird, as we have already noted, is a huge fowl capable of producing *son-et-lumière* shows that terrify; through it we become a Jupiter hurling thunderbolts, frightening ordinary mortals to death, burning barns, and driving dogs under tables. From this aerial warfare we can get back to the ground through the low-altitude pests, the insects. Here we can figure as a Hornet—carnivorous, stinging (it can kill), and driving human beings to cover whenever it appears.

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One other halfway approach to the surface: let's skip from air-ground to water-ground. Here we come across the Beaver—a busybody, of course, but busy how? The image we get is of buzz-saw teeth sheering off telephone poles across the road and damming up the streams of traffic for miles around. On the surface itself we find first a number of horses, but of a rather special sort (no Clydesdales or mules). There is the Colt—a juvenile or adolescent, untrained, irresponsible, gamboling at will. There is the Mustang, a half-wild number, unpredictable; it becomes pretty alarming when joined to the speed of sound and thus made into a Mustang Mach 1. Then there is the Charger, a war-horse that we think of in pitched battles and one-to-one combat. But much as we like the fighter horse, we are even fonder of large numbers of horses and their power. We like to have scores, even hundreds at our command; then we can apply the spur and accelerate a thundering herd into a mad drive that can trample all opposition underfoot.

Speed is better, indeed, when combined with jungle virtues. The Impala is of course an Antelope, and offhand it may seem not to be doing too much for us. Still, it is an Antelope via the Zulu, so that we have at least some tang of an African jungle. Doubtless only certain academics will recall that an antelope was once a "savage animal with sawlike horns," but surely even the most non-U subconscious will not fail, when the conscious sees or says "Impala," to register a gleeful note of "impaling" as the real function of the horns of the beast. Here the truth has an agreeably sneaky style that is lacking in the Wildcat and Cougar, where the savage beast is right out in the open. Likewise with the Jaguar, a beast both exotic and "ferocious." But once again the subsurface imagination is called upon by the Pantera, which suggests the mild usefulness of the tailor's shop, but which fronts for the ominous panther, "a leopard of a hypothetical exceptionally large fierce variety." Fe, fi, fo, fum.

A few cars literally record the intangible spirit of automobilism: they name the very moods and styles that are the reality we don't acknowledge and for the most part don't recognize. For instance, there is the Caprice, which releases one's love of the impulsive and the unpredictable (a way of frustrating the more

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rulebound cause-and-effect types). Still better is the Fury, an "intense, disordered, and often destructive rage," or the most merciless of the Greek avenging deities, or a frenzied woman subject to no controls. We get this rich passion in a form at once literal and imagistic in the Tempest, not the gentle rain from heaven, but the terrifying eyeless blast in the world and the soul. The Toronado seems to describe a lustful and destructive embrace of a tall and hot piece of real estate by a tornado, perhaps with a toreador doing a death-dance somewhere on the premises. After this vulgar richness it is almost an aesthetic relief to meet up with the final, plain, hideous, murderous whirlwind, the Cyclone, which with a lethal roar snatches men and objects off the ground and then smacks them down, torn to pieces. We have the common man's *King Lear:* soul and cosmos roaring and reeling together in terminal disintegration.

III

The car baptizers really hit us where we live with symbols for what we do not usually identify in ourselves. In showing how well they know us, they act negatively as well as affirmatively: they never try to sell us a car named Spoon or Rowboat or Salmon or Cow or Violet or Virginia Creeper or Sparrow or Job or Clear Day or Serenity or Peace or Patience. They know well that we do not associate cars with mild enjoyment, emotional balance, comfortable utility, self-effacement or charitableness. We associate them with the Old Adam on a free-swinging, sharp-shooting weekend.

If we betray ourselves in one way by preferring a car called Rattlesnake to one called Chicken, we betray ourselves in another by the style we use in counting highway deaths. We always call the total a "record," as in "Holiday Highway Deaths Set New Record." The official tone, of course, is one of lament, and presumably we all fall into line and have the right feelings for the occasion. Still, there is that word *record,* with its inevitable connotation, however submerged, of competition and achievement. We are stirred by a subterranean sense of distinction in finding things more awful than they ever were before, and of disappointment if our misdeeds do not come up to an expected figure. Sev-

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eral years ago the *New Yorker* exploited this possibility with breathtaking irony. The *New Yorker* reprinted a newspaper headline, "Holiday Highway Deaths Fall Below Record." Then it added the editorial comment, "Come on, men, get going."

We hardly plumb the depths of the issue if we only line up behind the magic terms of condemnation and remedial schemes (safety devices, driver education) and thus get a quick seat on the side of the angels. We line up in this way, of course, not out of vice, but partly out of ignorance and particularly because of the latent guilt that bubbles up from the pushed-down knowledge of where we ourselves come in. Free censure and compulsory reform are two frequent forms for the public emergence of private guilt. The Indianapolis 500 is of course a gladiatorial combat, but when the combat has its wholly inevitable results, we are caught out with our ids showing. We try to cover them up, especially from ourselves, by indignantly demanding that the gladiatorial spectacle be moderated by some devices that will bring it an inch closer to the Portuguese bullfight. We keep pushing down into the muck our almost overvisible faith that these devices will be inapplicable or circumventable. On the more widespread unrecognized gladiatorial front—the common man's front, the popular front—there are similar moves to vaccinate the public body against the secret aggressor hiding way beneath the surface of the public driving soul. The idea is to make all car makers make all cars so that they make all car drivers unable to make them go unless all persons who want to go in them are so trussed up, enswathed, encapsulated—literally, *matriculated*—that whatever happens, they cannot be born again and meet their maker.

On this compulsory good conduct in cars I will report two comments. One is from my friend the jolly analyst: "Sure, you force everybody to be a slave of all the devices that are supposed to protect him against you when you rip through the world, and then at last, guilt-free, you are free to rip through the world all you want to." The other comment is from a crusty codger, an old radical liberal who is always sounding off about freedom: "They talk of death with dignity! Ha! What I want is the freedom of undignified death, which is all you ever get on the highway. I'd rather have my skull cracked open on the concrete. Now

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they tell me I have to be halved or quartered by seatbelts, smothered by a balloon, or incinerated while trapped in the harness. The whole thing makes me furious. These do-gooders. Bad consciences, and so dictators. That's what they are, dictators." He paused, then spat out his final obscenity, "Prohibitionists!"

Then there is the idea that everybody should ride buses. What, we should be impotent nonentities, mere creatures of utility, utterly unfree to hasten wastefully, to gamble, to charge masterfully the crowd, the enemy, the others? But wait! Could we not name the bus the Mameluke, the Cossack, the Tamburlaine, the Dillinger, the Dracula, the Zachanassian, the Lucifer? Or the Incubus? Or Succubus?

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The Evolution of the American Catholic Left

JAMES HITCHCOCK

IN COMMON WITH MOST LIBERAL HEROES OF THE 1950S, the late Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray has suffered a precipitous decline in reputation in the past seven years or so. Father Murray, who taught at the Jesuit seminary in Woodstock, Maryland (it is now in Manhattan and likely to be closed), aroused the suspicions of conservative American Catholics in the postwar era by his subtle but far-reaching defense of the principle of church-state separation and, in general, his praise of the American political system as not only tolerable from a Catholic standpoint but basically in keeping with the best of the Church's own political teaching.

For a time in the 1950s Father Murray was forbidden by Rome to speak or write publicly on these issues, but the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965 seemed to vindicate his views, as it did the views of a number of other theologians (mostly from northern Europe) who had previously worked under a cloud. Especially in its decree *Dignitatis Humanae,* the council affirmed the positive good inherent in religious freedom and announced that the Church had neither the right nor the intention of curtailing this freedom.

Father Murray was the chief hero of American liberal Catholics of the preconciliar period for a number of reasons. Although fundamentally orthodox, he sought to speak to American secularists in their own terms and he appeared to be at home in their circles. An urbane man, he was clearly bothered by the cruder aspects of the American church. That he was a victim of censorship and had enemies in high places naturally added to his luster. Altogether he

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came to be seen not only as a thinker but as a personal symbol as well, of how the enlightened American Catholic might behave in the middle of the twentieth century.

Like most liberal Catholics of those years, Father Murray was especially concerned to dampen the fires of religious antagonism that had been so murderous in the past and had helped prevent American Catholicism from maturing. "Civility" was one of his favorite concepts. He celebrated the compromises necessary in a democratic system. And although he was uneasy about pure philosophical relativism and did not hesitate to remind non-Catholics of the anti-Catholicism in the nation's past, his basic theme was that Catholics must learn how their values could be inserted into the American consensus. Although his own thought was a good deal more complex, some of his admirers drew from it the conclusion that religion was largely a private matter, with only very tentative relations to political life, and that the rights and duties of American citizenship, properly understood, could safely define the Catholic's public behavior.

At the same time, the issues to which he addressed himself were never very precisely sorted out even in his own time, which helps explain the continuing confusion about them. "Conservative" Catholics were uncomfortable over the celebration of American pluralism, but in practice they were often more jingoistic than those who consciously sought to baptize the American system. "Liberals" regarded church-state separation as a positive good and thought that the Church's principal impact on public life would be through the laity, but they were always eager that bishops should condemn segregation and right-to-work laws.

Today the terrain on which those liberal-conservative debates of fifteen years ago took place is so altered that it is almost impossible even to reconstruct the paths that the participants trod. The current hero of the Catholic Left is another Jesuit—Daniel Berrigan, who is much less a rigorous thinker than Father Murray but much more a personal symbol. Both the Left and the Right in the Church take a certain noticeable pleasure in the eclipse of Father Murray's ideas, although there is no coherent and systematic body of thought to replace them.

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The rejection of the Catholic liberalism that Father Murray represented is of course intimately related to the rejection of liberalism in general by a revived American Left. In retrospect the Catholic liberal of the Kennedy years is seen as having accommodated himself to a fundamentally dishonest and exploitative system. The emphasis on "civility" and "dialogue," the diffidence about putting forth absolute positions, can now be made to appear either as moral complacency or as deliberate apology for the System. (Father Murray, for example, had asserted that the Civil War was not an ideological conflict but one of sectional self-interest, the implication being that ideology was unimportant in American life.)

The current Catholic Left has developed its own distinctive perspective, and in part (or, more accurately, in the minds of certain people), Catholic radicalism represents a reassertion of the central importance of religious values in political life, a denial that religion and politics can be separated in any real sense, in fact an assertion of the absolute nature of religious truths, which gives them a clear priority over all political considerations. Father Murray's position was a good deal more sophisticated than merely saying that religious values should be compromised for the sake of political civility, but it is against this view that some members of the Catholic Left are now reacting.

Catholic radicals now speak, in virtually every second sentence, of "the Gospel," a phrase which in Father Murray's time was less frequently heard. (Liberals of those days were more comfortable with philosophical principles handed down from Thomas Aquinas —a gospel that had been tempered by many centuries of application to the real world.) They point out that the Christ of the New Testament does not appear to be a very compromising sort of person, that he has little concern for civility, that he makes absolute demands on his followers that can lead even to the sacrifice of one's life. In brief the new radicalism makes an elementary and rather obvious point, which was nonetheless in danger of being obscured in the euphoric Kennedy years—that, if it means anything, religion must make extreme demands on people, that of its very nature it cannot be tamed and relegated to an inconspicuous back room of society.

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The Catholic New Left, in its purest form, thus asserts quite frankly the primacy of religion over politics, although religion is by no means equatable with the institutional churches. For some thirty years this was a lonely position upheld in American Catholicism almost solely by Dorothy Day and her Catholic Worker movement on New York's Lower East Side. Miss Day and her followers were (and are) gentle, pacifistic anarchists, and they were regularly arrested in acts of civil disobedience, usually directed against civil defense activities. Catholic liberals of the 1950s were admiring of the Catholic Worker and sometimes associated themselves with it for varying periods (Michael Harrington and John Cogley were both associated at one time), but generally also felt that it was politically irrelevant. Most Catholic liberals were not pacifists, much less anarchists, and they believed that electoral politics could accomplish more than saintly resistance. Suddenly in the 1960s it began to appear that it was the naïve Catholic Worker people who were truly "relevant" and the sophisticated liberals who were obsolete.

Presented with four possible models of priestly activity—traditional pastoral work and teaching, public office and radical resistance—Daniel Berrigan has rejected the third alone as invalid, because "a pure political solution in electoral politics is a dead-end. . . . really suffocates the independence of the Gospel. . . . I can't conceive of any possible Utopia to which I would give the allegiance that I want to give to the Gospel. And I think that's exactly what electoral politics demands of a man. . . ." Thus the Catholic Left has moved virtually half-circle—from Father Murray's quiet insistence on the need to fit religion into the American consensus to Father Berrigan's vigorous assertion that religion stands in judgment over all politics. (The war of course has had a great deal to do with this revolution. Father Berrigan's earliest difficulties with Father Murray's thought were apparently over the latter's defense of the "just war" theory and his assertion that pacifism was not really part of the Catholic tradition. Father Berrigan's remarks about priests in politics are inevitably seen as directed at the Jesuit congressman from Massachusetts, Robert Drinan.)

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The demoralization of American Catholicism at the present time can scarcely be exaggerated, and its causes are multiple, both obvious and hidden. The stance of the Catholic Left cannot be separated from this confusion, because its attitudes and tactics are in part a reaction to it and an attempt to overcome it. One view of the Berrigans—Daniel and his younger brother Philip, a former Josephite priest—is that they are essentially traditional Catholics with a strong sense of sin. In theology both would have to be regarded as more conservative—on questions like the Trinity and prayer—than many another priest who has no intention of going to prison. The Berrigans and their associates insist that the Gospel makes absolute moral demands, that the Christian must make strenuous efforts to dissociate himself from corrupt social systems, and that he must make restitution for evil. At a time when many progressive Catholics prefer to abandon the language of sin and judgment in favor of psychological talk about "growth" and "immaturity," the Berrigans' moralism appears rather old-fashioned, although they apply it mainly to social morality, not to moral issues like sexual behavior.

The Berrigans are crucial to the Catholic Left because they demonstrate that there is in fact something Catholic about it, an assurance that not all its adherents can validly offer. There is evident in Daniel Berrigan's thought a severe tension between the demands of political action and the appeal of an older, unworldly spirituality. He returns frequently to the theme of the monk and the monastery, worrying it, scrutinizing it from various angles, sometimes lashing out at it. He once wrote, addressing a well-known monk in a well-known American monastery, "Brother David, Mount Savior, do you read this?" and he once brought a group of Cornell S.D.S. members to a meeting with another cloistered community. (Apparently it did not go well.) He corresponded with the late Thomas Merton, the famous Kentucky Trappist, who offered him strong moral support, although the two men did not always agree.

Daniel Berrigan also identifies strongly with what he regards as the Jesuit tradition, arguing with some plausibility that from the beginning the Jesuits were supposed to be immersed in the

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world and free of institutional restraints, ready to act boldly in a variety of situations. He is fond of noting that the Elizabethan Jesuits also went underground and were pursued by the police. At the same time, however, he believes that unlike them he could not die solely for the Eucharist except insofar as it implies "that one does not kill and that one does not degrade and violate human life, and one is not a racist. Today, in other words, the important questions have an extraordinarily secularized kind of context."

Thus, despite his insistence that "I find no break with their tradition in what I am trying to stand for," there are considerable discontinuities in the Jesuit heritage as it passes through Father Berrigan. He does not, apparently, concede the Eucharist the central importance that it had for his predecessors. Perhaps more important, the phrase "extraordinarily secularized kind of context" masks the fact that the Jesuits of the sixteenth century were willing to support, actively or passively, a variety of religious wars that Father Berrigan would no doubt oppose. Transported back in time, he would very likely find himself in sharp conflict with his spiritual ancestors, for whom Jesuit militancy was not an exclusively spiritual thing.

The Berrigans' political witness, intentionally or not, has been a large chapter in the story of the secularization of the clerical vocation during the past ten years, as substantial numbers of priests and nuns began to doubt the validity of their "sacral" roles—administering the sacraments, teaching religion, giving personal spiritual counsel. Many of these persons were sincere and deeply troubled, and the ebbing of their religious *raison d'être* forced them to look for something equally compelling. (Many other ex-religious have settled easily into a comfortable middle-class life.) Paradoxically the result has sometimes been a renewed kind of clericalism, as priests and nuns have provided vigorous leadership in a political world previously thought to have been reserved for the laity. Thus Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, former chairman of the National Coalition of American Nuns, made a flying, one-week visit to Paris in 1971 and returned to announce that the United States was not serious about the peace negotiations; she offered general advice on American diplomacy (the ambassador should

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take tea breaks with the North Vietnamese, et cetera), a form of instant clerical expertise that liberal Catholics ordinarily find quite offensive. Two Jesuits debated the validity of the Berrigans' position, and the more "liberal" of the two attempted to settle the question definitively with an appeal to papal authority on the question of war. The Berrigans themselves came to value the discipline of celibacy, and grew somewhat scornful of married clerics and laymen, when they discovered that family ties made men hesitant about going to jail, although Philip Berrigan later married a former nun. To a degree the new Catholic radicalism has seen intense, charismatic clerics sternly admonishing the rest of the Church on its religious duties and systematically shutting off all routes through which conscience might seek to escape. In a phrase Catholic progressives often use pejoratively in other contexts, they are "guilt-mongers."

At the same time there are also other "Catholic" radicals for whom political involvement appears not to be an imperative derived from their religion, but rather a substitute for it. It was a familiar phenomenon in the 1960s for earnest Catholics—religious and lay both—to go into the ghettos, join the peace movement, even go to Africa or Latin America to work, all because the love of Christ demanded it, only to discover after a while that their religious ideals no longer meant very much to them, that their commitment was now totally secular. David Miller, a student and protégé of Daniel Berrigan, who was the first American imprisoned for burning his draft card, was released after two years in 1970 and announced that he was no longer either a Christian or a pacifist, a statement that shocked Father Berrigan.

The decline of religious beliefs has affected Catholic radicals in a variety of obscure ways. Most noticeable is the fact that very often the moral passion and the absolutism remain even after the theological framework has dissolved. The religious attitude persists, although directed at other goals and harnessed to other causes. For some the commitment to political absolutes appears to be a psychological necessity, to fill the void formerly occupied by the Church. A certain element of guilt appears to be operative, as the radical insists that, despite having discarded all his theological

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baggage, he is more truly a Christian than ever, because of the purity of his social commitment.

Michael Novak has articulated another theory about the transformation of "liberal" Catholicism into "radical" Catholicism: "the discovery of sex," pointing out that "the voyage out of the ghetto is often sexual in symbol." The Catholic Left has been rather evasive on the subject, in part out of fear lest the Right exploit the sensational, in part also in the fear that by admitting to being sexually emancipated they will create skepticism about their political motives. The extent to which sexual liberation is connected to a radical commitment is difficult to assess, largely because the subject has been under a taboo. There have been a number of politically involved priests and nuns, however, who have left the religious life to marry, and Garry Wills has revealed that at Woodstock, both before and after its move to New York, activist Jesuit seminarians were in regular contact with women in the peace movement, some of whom they later married. Anthony Scobolick and Mary Cain, priest and nun who married and were later among the Harrisburg Eight defendants in 1972, originally met on a draft-board raid.

The most dramatic case, however, was that of Philip Berrigan and Sister Elizabeth McAlister, both also of the Harrisburg Eight, who last spring announced that they had considered themselves married, by mutual agreement, for four years, although they did not have a formal ceremony until the time of the announcement. In retrospect new meaning could be read into the letters that the couple exchanged while Philip Berrigan was in prison and that were used by the prosecution at the Harrisburg trial, somewhat to the embarrassment of the defendants. Their need to correspond was in fact the precipitating cause of the government's discovery that Philip Berrigan was smuggling out illegal letters, which were then used to support the conspiracy charge.

The announcement of the Berrigan-McAlister marriage was something of an embarrassment to their admirers, in part because, even while he considered himself married, Father Berrigan had extolled the advantages of clerical celibacy and referred contemptuously to the caution and prudence that marital responsibilities

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imposed on those in the peace movement. Sister Elizabeth accepted a dispensation from her vows after the announcement of her marriage, but Berrigan refused to seek any formal permission from the Church. The extent to which any of this is significant is not clear; what is clear is that it is not altogether irrelevant.

If the Catholic Left has been in any way distinctive, it is probably because, as Michael Novak says, "it is more symbolic, more romantic, more dashing, more liturgical in its protest than other groups." Instinctively the Berrigans and their associates cast their resistance in the form of ritual—especially fire and blood—designed to proclaim their moral witness not in a verbal, Protestant fashion but through ancient symbolism. It was perhaps their Catholicism that led them to hope that ritual would prove powerful and efficacious where mere words had often failed. Yet in the end, self-consciously more "modern" persons objected to this ritual on the same grounds that they objected to the Latin Mass or the burning of vigil lights in church—it seemed to do no good; it left everything the same. Daniel Berrigan replied that of course it had not been a useful, political act. Too many people were hung up on usefulness. If you're useful, you're disposable. How useful were the acts of the martyrs? Since politics weren't working anyway, one had to find an act beyond politics—a religious act, a liturgical act, an act of witness. It was the hallmark of the Catholic Left in America that it put its hope in religious witness, in moral passion, in the possibility of converting large numbers of Americans. To an extent that will never be determined, it may have succeeded. In the hour of its success, however, there were already contrary tendencies at work. The era of the Berrigans may already be over.

At a rally in a church basement in Baltimore in 1968, called to support the Berrigans and seven others on trial for raiding a draft board (the Catonsville Nine), a former Maryknoll priest from Guatemala, Blase Bonpane, followed a passionately pacifistic speech of Dorothy Day's by shouting, "Nonviolence is an imperialist solution" and calling for guerrilla warfare in Latin America. (The Maryknolls are an American order working almost exclusively in foreign missions. Father Bonpane and several other

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Maryknolls had been recalled from Guatemala for helping to arm native insurgents.) The outburst was shocking at the time, because Catholic radicalism had always based itself on a religious nonviolence; its condemnation of the war proceeded entirely from that. Father Bonpane had raised a question which, in its way, had been avoided as assiduously as the subject of sex—effectiveness. Were religious witness, moral passion, symbolic protest to be considered any longer adequate, or must the man truly concerned with justice concern himself also with results and do whatever is necessary to achieve them?

Despite Daniel Berrigan's scornful dismissal of pragmatism, such questions had never been entirely absent from his own mind or those of his companions, although they were seldom raised openly and were usually cloaked in a good deal of ambiguity and vagueness. The questions were raised implicitly in the attitude of the Catholic radicals toward persons and movements who quite clearly are not nonviolent in philosophy or, in most cases, in practice—S.D.S., the Black Panthers, the Vietcong, North Vietnam and Fidel Castro.

At Cornell, where he served for a time as a chaplain, Daniel Berrigan apparently had good rapport with S.D.S., which he nonetheless criticized frequently for its intolerant attitudes. He later rebuked the Weathermen for their turn to violence, but he also defended them as having been driven to it by a violent society and suggested that too much emphasis was being placed on the violence of the young radicals instead of on the violence of the System. He accepted uncritically the Cornell black students' version of their famous march with guns in 1968, ignoring the reports of some professors that they and their families had been threatened because they spoke against the black demands. Philip Berrigan has also lauded and criticized S.D.S. and praised unreservedly the black students at Cornell, saying that he has no quarrel with their symbolic use of guns.

Daniel Berrigan has been critical of the Panthers, defending the nonviolence of Martin Luther King as a better alternative. Philip Berrigan, who was formerly a pastor in the Baltimore slums (his Josephite order is an American group founded to

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work among blacks), praises both the Panthers and Eldridge Cleaver.

The ambiguity present in these remarks is intensified considerably in the Berrigans' attitudes toward Third World revolutionaries. Daniel Berrigan has referred to Castro, Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh as each "a peaceable man, a man of his people," and he has formulated a rule for revolutionaries that appears to be merely a reformulation of the old Catholic "just war" theory —place limits on the use of violence, mourn the bloodshed on both sides, issue stern rules against torture, do not fill the prisons, et cetera. Toward the regime of North Vietnam, which he once visited, he is similarly ambiguous, affirming the need to condemn violence and bloodletting but also the need to look for signs of hope for the future. His comments on life in North Vietnam are generally benign and optimistic, with little disposition to question official versions of the truth. Philip Berrigan, although he questions violent revolution as a method of progress, also admires the Cuban and North Vietnamese experiments ("I have it on very good authority.") and believes the results of revolution in these places have been hopeful. He does not believe comfortable westerners have a right to condemn violent revolutionaries.

The Berrigans have not explicitly endorsed violence in a revolutionary cause, and its use obviously makes them uncomfortable. Yet they have repeatedly given the impression over the past few years that they regard abstinence from violence as a fundamental moral absolute, and this, on closer inspection, proves to be not exactly the case. They are prepared under certain conditions to "understand" violence, to refrain from condemning it, to approve movements that use it without inquiring too closely into how it is used. Daniel Berrigan in particular tends to lapse into vague abstractions when confronted with difficult questions. Speaking of Weathermen wanted by the police he says, "They were involved in trashing in Chicago. . . . and later when there were those other explosions going on, too," the word "explosions" used semimetaphorically to blur the fact that some of the Weathermen are wanted for perpetrating quite literal explosions. When asked to compare the tactics of the Weathermen with those of the Ku

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Klux Klan, he speaks only of "their violent rhythm . . . induced by the violence of society itself" and "the insanity of our society" and his hope that the Weathermen's violence would not "take over and dominate them." Asked about revolutionary violence in the Third World, he says that "I would be inclined, first of all, to try to get a firsthand experience of it in some way . . . before I said *anything* about it" and "How can I be asked to transplant my moral judgment into the Third World? . . . As a citizen of one of those impoverished, desperate countries . . . I could not be forced to take up arms and kill anybody. . . . I could think of a hundred things to do to help sustain the survival struggle of a good people."

The uncertainty of the Berrigans' attitude toward revolutionary violence does not seem motivated so much by pragmatism—the belief that violence sometimes gets results, which fact seems undeniable—as by an unwillingness to give comfort to conservatives by criticizing leftist movements and, more importantly, by the desire to see, somewhere, concrete signs of hope. An uncompromising pacifism tends ultimately to a condemnation of almost all existing political movements and can result therefore in despair or in apolitical moralism. The Berrigans clearly wish to avoid these traps, but their avoidance inevitably tends to compromise the rigorous moral purity that they have consistently preached. There is a sense that they do not wish to know the full truth about movements they admire.

If in its purest form the Berrigans' activism affirmed the absolute priority of religious values over political ones, they quickly found themselves involved in politics whether or not they liked it. The movement had to be sustained, and this did not always allow for acting on the purest of moral principles. The chief witness against the Harrisburg Eight (who were acquitted of charges of conspiracy to kidnap Henry Kissinger and blow up heating ducts in the Pentagon) was Boyd Douglas, a prisoner with Philip Berrigan at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, who was a paid F.B.I. informer pretending to be part of the movement. Supporters of Philip Berrigan concede that it was partly his own naïveté that led him to trust Douglas, a convicted arsonist, forger and perjurer claiming

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to be a political prisoner. They are understandably outraged that the government would employ as a witness a man who appears to be a habitual criminal and compulsively unable to tell the truth about anything. Yet a certain irony in all this is generally missed —Douglas's pathologies are deemed sufficient to disqualify him morally from serving as a government agent or a prosecution witness, but these same pathologies apparently did not disqualify him from being a member of Philip Berrigan's underground. Had he not turned out to be a spy he would probably still be regarded as a political prisoner and his services as useful. While in prison Philip Berrigan had written of his elation over the fact that he was recruiting convicts for the peace movement, "car thieves, bank robbers, old and experienced cons, creative, personable, violent, racist. But what an injection they'll add to our movement. . . ." What an injection indeed! Apparently Father Berrigan was not inclined to consider too closely what kind of "peace movement" might result from such recruiting. Implicit in much of the Berrigans' writings is the old cry, "No enemies on the Left!"

At this point it appears legitimate to ask whether the Berrigans themselves are not moving beyond their own previous stance of witness; they clearly are uncertain. Daniel Berrigan admits that, after prison (at Danbury, Connecticut), he is "in limbo" and has to ask the question, "what's next?" Speaking of the term "nonviolence," he says, "Well, I just don't like the term because I think it is kind of ambiguous. I would prefer to say that our part in the resistance has never had violence attached to it." He goes on to condemn all modern war, but then expresses his uncertainties about revolution. Philip Berrigan, addressed in prison by Sister Elizabeth McAlister about the possible kidnapping of Henry Kissinger, warned that such tactics could lead to murder but then added, "When I refer to murder it is not to prohibit it absolutely (violence versus nonviolence bag), it is merely to observe that one has set the precedent. . . . " He also hinted that he and his brother (who had originally been reluctant to join in the Catonsville draft-board raid) did not share the same views of the struggle. "He is trying to radicalize a wide range of liberals.

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Whereas you're working with hard core radicals. . . . I remember how we operated with him—always happy to have him in a rap, but undisturbed when he couldn't make it. His talents grab on a different level than ours, and are most effective there."

The Berrigans' apparent uncertainty as to how far violence is admissible in the struggle for justice seems to represent a retreat from their previous religious absolutism, their insistence that the Gospel makes uncompromising demands on the Christian which he may not evade. Tentatively they seem to be edging toward the position of the theological secularizers of the past decade—that the principal purpose of the Gospel is the proclamation of a future world of perfect justice and peace. In this sense the Gospel makes no alien demands, and it is imperative to concern oneself with effective strategies and tactics for achieving this world. Moral witness is not enough. On the other hand, Daniel Berrigan has been at Union Theological Seminary in New York conducting seminars on the thought of the French Protestant theologian Jacques Ellul, a thinker who has puzzled many religious activists because, despite his own participation in the Resistance in World War II, he argues powerfully against politics as in any sense able to save the world, and calls for a return to the "pure" Gospel. The extent of his influence over Father Berrigan is still uncertain.

On the eve of the Harrisburg Eight trial, late in 1971, one of the defendants, a Pakistani Moslem named Eqbal Ahmad, had criticized the Catholic Left because "Some of these people seem to put a higher premium on witness and symbolism than they do on calculation and what is politically viable." It was a criticism that had been frequently made but never before so close to home. It voiced feelings that other leftists who considered themselves Catholics also shared. There was growing evidence that the Berrigans, having for a time been virtually canonized, would either have to adopt a more hardheaded approach to political issues or make way for other leaders.

In 1970, a Milwaukee priest, Nicholas Riddell, had participated in a draft-board raid in Chicago, in obvious imitation of the Berrigans, and had afterwards gone underground. In 1971 he wrote letters to a Chicago newspaper indicating that he had been

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converted from pacifism to violent revolution. In the fall of the same year, on a Sunday evening, he led a group of armed persons into a Catholic rectory in a suburb of Saint Louis and terrorized the elderly housekeeper while the group searched for money. (On Sunday evening the day's collection is likely to be on hand, and priests are generally out visiting their families.) A priest returning early saw what was happening and called the police. Father Riddell shot at a policeman, but he and his group were captured. He was sentenced to fifteen years in the Missouri penitentiary and also received sentence on charges connected with the draft-board raid.

Father Riddell's odyssey indicates several recurrent themes on the Catholic Left, including the evident need for an absolute commitment (he was a Carmelite, a medieval order given to great austerities and intense prayer) and sexual emancipation (for several months he had been living with a woman in Saint Louis). Other than some attempts to raise money for his defense, there was little inclination by Catholic radicals to make Father Riddell a hero. Sorrow and dismay were expressed that society had driven him to extremes, but he went to prison without the support of committees, celebrated lawyers, or courtroom demonstrations.

It may yet prove to be the case, however, that Father Riddell will be the model for the radical cleric of the next decade as the Berrigans were of the last. In fact he seems to have modeled himself on Camillo Torres, a Colombian priest who was killed fighting with a guerrilla band in 1967. A few months after Father Riddell went to prison, the new general of the Carmelites, the Dutchman Falco Thuis, announced in Chicago that the order would increasingly devote itself to social-action programs, especially in "Third World situations." He affirmed that it is the order's duty to support revolutionary priests in trouble because "it would be against the spirit of solidarity to wash our hands of trouble." There was no indication whether he had Father Riddell in mind.

By now there is a general consensus on the Catholic Left that guerrilla warfare is not only justified but probably the only possible course of action in certain parts of the world, especially Latin

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America. The secularization of the Gospel has now reached the point where nonviolence, in the Third World, seems to be a largely meaningless concept and radical Catholics are prepared to identify the cause of Christ almost entirely with revolutionary movements. If radicals of the Berrigan generation insisted on the primacy of religion over politics, the newest generation tends to identify the two, with politics virtually obliterating religion.

Thus the official magazine of the Maryknoll fathers, many of whose American missionaries and native converts suffered greatly under the Communist regime in China, publishes an article on "the Asian revolution" that sees the Chinese experience as "creditable" and as giving "the rest of Asia an example of the potentialities of development through a dictatorial regime that combines power with a sense of purpose and continual communication with the masses." The human costs of this "development" are politely ignored. A Maryknoll priest in Milwaukee gives talks in which he displays Korean paintings showing fat, arrogant, grotesquely complacent westerners being cast down from their fortresses by angry crowds of the Third World. Maryknoll also sponsors the publication in the United States of the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, perhaps the most currently influential of the theologians of revolution.

Bishop Sergio Mendez Arceo, who has sheltered a variety of radical Catholic movements under his umbrella in Cuernavaca, Mexico, was a leading participant in a 1972 meeting of "Christians for Socialism" in Santiago, Chile. The conference issued a document that was unabashedly Marxist in its terminology and concepts, including "a necessary class confrontation." The participants also unanimously rejected the possibility of a Christian "third way" between socialism and capitalism and rejected also any talk of a "Christian socialism" distinct from the common struggle, since such a movement would distract and divide the working class. Frequently quoted was Che Guevara's demand that Christians in Latin America give "integral revolutionary witness." Total political involvement was called for rather than simple moral witness. In 1972 also the Latin American office of the National (United States) Catholic Conference sponsored a meeting in Wash-

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ington at which various radical groups expressed even stronger opinions. (Challenged because she apparently preached a message of hate, a young woman is reported to have said, "I was a nun for nine years and I don't believe in God.")

The newest stage of Christian involvement seems therefore to demand that sincere people join in revolutionary struggles without moral or tactical reservations. If this is perhaps the ultimate secularization of the Gospel, it partakes at least of a residual religiosity in that it makes a final, absolute demand on the individual and allows him no possibility of compromise, even with his own conscience. In Cuba this appears to mean identification with the regime, which is regarded as doing essentially religious work through its efforts against poverty and ignorance. As a truly Marxist society, it is seen as truly Christian also. Christians who have reservations about the government are regarded as being merely old-fashioned or insensitive to social needs. Personal religion is discouraged by revolutionary priests and seminarians, who regard themselves as missionaries to the Church, so that Christians can find their own roles in the revolution. Bishop Mendez, who has visited Cuba, says that "the Gospel is class-based where there are classes, but class-based on the poor, not on the rich." He rejoices that Cuban seminarians are becoming "men of the Revolution," and he says that Marxism "in its scientific aspect, as an analysis of reality, is perfectly acceptable to a Christian." Catholics also identified strongly with the Marxist government of Salvador Allende in Chile, and talk of a marriage between Catholicism and Marxism was given enthusiastic endorsement by, among others, American Maryknoll missionaries, who have denounced the new Chilean military government and defended Allende's policies. Several American missionaries have been jailed by the new regime.

Certain French Catholics appear to give these developments a validity for the "First World" as well. Hervé Chaigne, a Franciscan associated with the *Frères du Monde* movement of Bordeaux, argues for the total secularization of Christianity, without even any residual claims to religious authority or message. Theology, as discussion of dogma and worship, is a distraction from

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"the great terrestrial goal . . . the most rapid possible amelioration of the moral and physical existence of the poor." All transcendence must be eliminated as an attempt to "disarm social militants."

As yet, North American Catholic radicals seem uncertain about how far such theories are applicable in their own country, but the Catholic Left in America has always taken its cues from abroad. In terms of its economic and political situation, the United States is not equatable with Brazil or Colombia. Yet the logic of the leftist position seems to lead inexorably to a total Christian identification with "revolution" at home also, on behalf of disadvantaged classes and because the "mother country" is the cause of most of the injustice in the rest of the world. As yet there has been a hesitation about spelling out this conclusion, but many radical American Catholics, who have for a long time professed a thoroughly secularized Gospel, will find few grounds for resisting it once it is spelled out. Their Catholicism, here as elsewhere, may melt imperceptibly into a dogmatic Marxism, infused with a passion and commitment left over from religion.

A Catholic Left of the kind that now exists was virtually unthinkable in America as recently as ten years ago, when the Catholic Worker movement was still regarded by some conservatives as a Red front. From being super-Americans and superobedient, some Catholics have gone to being superrebels. The American church as a whole, however, has not been radicalized, any more than American society has been radicalized by the New Left. A few bishops have offered moral support to the Berrigans in prison. A few more have strongly criticized the war. Among clergy, nuns and seminarians, as well as among younger laymen, political opinions are a good deal more "leftist" than was formerly the case. But the impact of the Catholic Left on the Church itself has been weakened by the fact that so many radicals have dropped out of the Church altogether and those who have remained, like the Berrigans, show little interest in Catholic issues.

In an unintended way the Catholic Left has hastened the declericalization of the Church, since, as conservative laymen observe the behavior of the Berrigans, they are generally not moved to think twice about their own opinions, but rather to discount

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a little more whatever they are told by priests and nuns. The F.B.I. agents who arrested Daniel Berrigan, and the prosecutors at the Harrisburg trial, were Catholics who seemed to do their work with great relish. A subdued right-wing anticlericalism now exists in the American church, which did not exist a decade ago.

Despite their radical Irish working-class backgrounds, the Berrigans chose not to address themselves to the Catholic masses, whose conversion to the peace movement would have been of inestimable importance. Both men have been criticized (notably by Michael Novak) for in effect preaching to the converted—Philip to inner-city blacks and hard-core peace activists, Daniel to college students and liberals. Questioned about his attitude toward the confused and despised "middle American," Daniel Berrigan responded with characteristic vague generalities and later affirmed, after being pushed, that the "nonviolent people" have the right to decide which institutions and persons have authority and which do not. Last fall Father Berrigan picketed a Catholic hospital in New York City that was planning to expand at the expense of neighboring dwellings, reminding the hospital's administrators (mainly nuns) that, despite the possibility of monetary compensation, "Most people . . . would like to attain a life-style that means more than survival," and asserting "You've got to consult with the whole community. . . ." He did not advert to the fact that many rank-and-file Catholics have been profoundly disturbed by the destruction of their religious life-styles in the past decade by clerical reformers who have never perceived a need to consult "the whole community."

The effects of the Catholic Left on the general climate of opinion in America are no doubt considerable, if unmeasurable. Their effects on the Church itself have been important too, in terms of broadening considerably the acceptable limits of clerical thought and action, of forcing at least some people to think much more critically about public issues. Given the fact that the leftist viewpoint is never likely to represent more than a small minority of the Church, what the Berrigans have chiefly done, ironically, is to make American Catholicism more "pluralistic," in a way not unrelated to what John Courtney Murray urged fifteen years ago.

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Winter in the Country

MARY OLIVER

The terror of the country
Is not the easy death,
The fall of hawks out hunting
Across the musical earth,

Nor yet the useless borning
In every leafy den.
The terror is that nothing
Laments the narrow span.

Beasts of all marvelous feature,
Of vibrant hoof and wing,
Watch the white hands of winter
Undoing everything,

And do not cry or argue.
The starvelings of the day
Never dreamt of better.
Nibbling, they fall away.

The terror of the country
Is prey and hawk together,
Still flying, both exhausted,
In the blue sack of weather.

✪ MARY OLIVER's books are *No Voyage* and *The River Styx, Ohio.* In 1973 she was co-winner of the Castagnola Award and is now working on another book.

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Unknown Novels

ROGER SALE

NO NOVEL IS UNKNOWN TO EVERYONE; the author, the editor, the agent, some friends of each, *they* know. Hordes of novels are published every year in this country, and most are never heard of or from. If the author is at all serious about the book, it must be very disheartening to struggle to get it right, get it finished, get it into print, only to have it spottily noticed, and then disappear. Maybe a third of the novels of a given year are hopelessly bad, maybe as many as half are cynically produced hackwork confections never meant to be taken seriously, and maybe as many as thirty to fifty of those remaining are seriously reviewed and read in a year; that still leaves as many as a hundred authors, each of whom has a novel, a not worthless piece of work, and each of whom ends up discovering that he, his agent, his editor and his friends, are guardians of a well-kept secret.

Such writers must occasionally look around, or up, and feel envious and bitter. They stand, as it were, at the base of a pyramid, and all the other novelists are somewhere, probably above them. At the top of this pyramid, at what I will call level 1, are those very few American novelists who are always and instantly news; if we do not fuss much about identifying the precise or total membership, we can say that at level 1 right now are Bellow, Roth, Nabokov, Updike, Mailer. Level 2 at its upper reaches blends easily into level 1, and consists of novelists who are guaranteed serious reviews in many places, who win prizes, who have admirers convinced that they are among the very best: Pynchon, Malamud, Morris, Welty, Barthelme, Ellison, Heller, Gass, Vonnegut, Salinger, Oates, Hawkes, Styron, Capote—again, we do

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not so much need to agree on the names as to recognize the category. Then, at its lower reaches, 2 blends into 3, what might be thought of as the novel reader's level: serious writers who have little difficulty getting work published but whose audience tends to be restricted to literary people. Here one has to begin to give first names: Hortense Calisher, Reynolds Price, Frederick Buechner, Evan Connell, Stanley Elkin, Bruce Jay Friedman, R. V. Cassill, Thomas Rogers, George P. Elliott, Edward Hoagland, Terry Southern, Alison Lurie, James Purdy, Herbert Gold—this list could be greatly extended, of course, which at least can tell us that not everyone is doomed to end up unknown, although many will be only dimly or partially seen. Writers on level 3 often move up the pyramid and even more often move down; with *Augustus,* John Williams may have appeared on level 3, but sometime recently, Vance Bourjailly, perhaps Calder Willingham, or Peter Matthiessen, disappeared from it.

At level 4 we find, first, compartments of people who write things like detective stories, science fiction, spy thrillers, Westerns, Gothic novels; lots of writers in these categories are quite well known, like Chester Himes, Ross Macdonald, John D. MacDonald, Robert A. Heinlein, Ray Bradbury, yet they stay at or near level 4 because the world tends to decide that only freaks can take them seriously. But a good deal more of level 4 is just books; one goes to any public library and finds them lining the shelves: *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, The Caine Mutiny, Battle Cry,* the works of Robert Nathan, Hamilton Basso, Paul Gallico. There may be some excellent books at level 4—I have heard it said, for instance, that Charles Jackson's *The Lost Weekend* is a fine book—but it is very rare that a writer at level 4 is ever accorded the serious attention that other novelists receive. I am quite sure, for instance, that both Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain have offered serious literary people far more pleasure than their contemporary and fellow Californian, John Steinbeck—yet Steinbeck won the prizes, and the recognition.

Then, more alongside than in the pyramid itself, we find James Baldwin, Mary McCarthy, Gore Vidal, Susan Sontag, Katherine Anne Porter, James Dickey, Robert Creeley—writers better known

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for their essays, stories or poems, but who have written at least one novel, and who are in the enviable position of being widely reviewed and advertised even though they are not primarily novelists at all.

The writers at all these levels have had a chance; the machinery of publishing and reviewing and academic criticism has worked well enough in their cases so that they are known by many people who do not know them personally. Of course few writers feel that they have been adequately recognized, or valued, or financially rewarded, and most feel that the novel is never taken seriously enough in this country. Publishers are often alleged to be chintzy, the marketplace is easily compared to a brothel, and the journals of opinion, especially those located in New York, are constantly accused of logrolling. But all writers above level 5 must admit, if only in moments of rare candor, that inadequate praise and critical drubbings are preferable to being unknown; most would admit that good luck played a considerable part in giving them whatever eminence they have enjoyed.

I am not going to stop to ponder these strokes of good luck, these instances of back scratching and greed and blindness; they exist, and they must gall many writers who have never benefited from them. I want, rather, to write about a few books and writers who are, for all intents and purposes, unknown, and who deserve better. I am not concerned here with neglected masterpieces; there may be one in this country, but I don't know it, and I am sure no good comes from looking for that rare object if, in the process, other books, not masterpieces, are casually tossed aside that never received the decent attention and criticism they deserve. There are hundreds of possible candidates, and of course I know only a handful; it would be nice to think that others will respond with their own lists and comments. There is no need to agree precisely on our evaluations since we all know when dealing with minor novelists that the reader's temperament plays a large role in determining that evaluation. I have tried here, however, to avoid books for which I can identify my temperamental affinity, and I have not pretended to be fully rounded in my judgments, since there is no point in carefully listing the shortcomings of

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novels that very few people know. Mostly I have tried to indicate what sort of book it is that I am discussing, and the kinds of pleasure that one can find there.

All of the books that I am considering are American, and were written within the last generation; none falls into a special generic category like the detective story or the children's book; all are level 5 books, as far as I can determine. I am not so much interested, then, in the underrated or the wrongly classified, as in the unknown. To indicate the distinction I am trying to make, let me describe a yardstick I found myself using. Gina Berriault and Edward Lewis Wallant are both good and not well-known novelists, but each, I discovered, had been borrowed more than twenty times from my local library in the last five years, and that makes them, by my rough calculation, level 3 writers, although of course both could sink to level 5 very easily. On the other hand, the novels of Thomas Savage have been borrowed from the same library about once every other year. Such reckonings are crude and may be quite inaccurate, but often, in making my choices, I had only these guidelines to follow. Finally, let me add that I have tended to ignore more recent writers who have as yet written only one or two books; they may well be doomed for oblivion, especially if they write no more, but it is a little too early to tell.

A note, to show the kind of thing these level 5 novels are up against. As I begin, four books plague me, because I can't honestly claim to know them although they have been in the recesses of my consciousness since I began work on this project. The first is Cynthia Ozick's *Trust,* a huge book that I noted on the shelves because I had read some of her stories and essays. I simply didn't get down to it until too late, and so read barely a hundred pages, and they didn't deeply excite me, so I regretfully laid it aside; I hope someone who knows it is a wonderful novel will rebuke me. Second and third, H. F. M. Prescott's *Man on a Donkey,* and Edith Simon's *The Golden Hand.* People I admire have lavishly recommended both books, and I started both more than once, but never wanted to go on. Both are very long, and I simply felt defeated at the prospect of reading three hundred pages to see if I wanted to finish them; I conclude that there is a kind of long

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minor novel one is willing to give every chance, and another kind one isn't. Fourth, Margaret Boylan, *The Marble Orchard,* which I read years ago and rather liked, but which I simply could not get hold of to reread. It is about a blind girl who suddenly discovers she can see but tells no one she can; I remember it mostly for details, especially, for some reason, a passage about the way the girl's parents speak of things only by brand names—not coffee, but "the Beech Nut," not car wax, but "the Johnson's." Since many books are memorable only for such details, I can only say I'm sorry that, around here, *The Marble Orchard* is not just unknown, but unknowable.

I begin with two regional novels of my own region, the Pacific Northwest. Presumably every state has its authors, but in the postwar years the only regions nationally acknowledged are Jewish New York and the South. In the Northwest the only novels that have gained real recognition are H. L. Davis's *Honey in the Horn* and Ken Kesey's vastly overrated *One Flew Over the Cockoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion.* But, being a young region, it tends to have lots of writers and few really good ones; there is no novel, however ordinary or flaky, from which someone who knows and loves the area cannot learn something, but there are only two that I am sure someone from elsewhere could like.

Jack Thomas Leahy's *Shadow on the Water* (Knopf, 1960, out of print), in its best moments achieves a wonderful harmony of a Huck Finn story of a lad coming to learn of the corruption and ineffectuality of his elders with a background of the last territory ahead there will ever be, an Indian village on the Washington coast, a town so far from anywhere that Seattle is a long trip away. This is Leahy's only novel, and that is rather a pity since its major fault results from an awareness of technique discovered in creative writing classes, which is precisely the sort of defect one easily grows beyond. The novel demands the technique, a naive storytelling equally suited to the boy's consciousness and to the stories he hears from his grandfather about the Indians; both the boy and the Indians are ground under and stupefied by

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the heartlessness or the indifference of the older whites. The trouble arises whenever we become aware that behind the innocent narrator is a knowing author, when we know far more than the narrator or the Indians do about what is happening to them, as in a sequence in which the boy and his Indian friend are picked up by a homosexual in Seattle and we know, but the boys don't, what is happening to them. But the advent of the new white exploiters, first a team of anthropologists, then developers who turn the Indians into a sideshow, is wonderfully done. At the end, when the boy's Indian friend is crushed under a horse he has been made to ride because "Indians ride horses" (even though the coastal tribes had never seen them), we find Leahy and his narrator at one:

> I turned then, and looked toward the mountains, the peaceful mountains, and I wondered how they could remain so beautiful. I knew, then, suddenly, what Grandfather had tried to tell me. I knew that where there was beauty, there was now ugliness; that where there had been joy there was now despair; that where there had been the truth of the heart, there was now only the emptiness of the soul. And, knowing that, I walked away from the beach.

One notes the effortful posing, the first novel shining through, but when one comes on that moment one wants to swallow it whole, so telling has been the rendering of the beauty that was and the ugliness that is. Since Leahy, writing in the late fifties, had no Third World or environmental fashions to buttress him, had to invent for himself a method that would bring the boy and the Indians into a single focus, he sometimes stumbled. By the same token, since the fashions weren't there, he could bring real freshness to his details and sense of place. *Shadow on the Water* is a fine little book, one that needs no regionalist, no fashionable perspective. It means its language to be of the heart, and that is what leads to its sentimentalities, but its language really is of the heart, too, which is another matter entirely.

Allis McKay grew up in what was becoming the apple country along the Columbia River, and she grew up convinced both that it was a possessing landscape and that it had possessed her mother

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more than it could her, so that when she sees the cliffs, the orchards, and the river, she sees her mother in the landscape. She left it when she grew up and moved to Chicago, but came back to start asking the older people how it had been. The result is two novels, *They Came to a River* (Binsford & Mort, 1941, in print, but hard to find outside the Northwest), and *Two Women at Pine Creek* (Macmillan, 1966, out of print). Both are good; it doesn't matter which you start with, but the first is better. It is a very long novel that works entirely with rhythms and anecdotes—no rich human creations, no fine writing, no driving plot, but a real shape. The anecdotes that are best all bespeak a telling innocence—a lad climbing arduously out of the valley to see Halley's comet, only to discover that he can't locate it even from the highest rim; a woman reading Greek myths that she can barely understand to her children so they will at least have heard the names; a man who finally admits to himself after years of accumulating evidence that his brother is cheating him of all he loves, and who then kills him, dumbly. But the cumulative effect is of experience gained and held; the path from innocence to wisdom is taken not so much through experience as through the rhythms established by repeated loyalties to neighbors and to harvests. Which is why the book must be long; it must abjure not only melodrama and big scenes, but plot as well, in order to gain its shape, the arc of a generation. Where a writer like Ken Kesey is pitifully nostalgic, McKay is winningly direct, and thereby tough, claiming not some mythic America but only these lives, this place, as her subject. But all this, which is the source of her strength, is also what keeps her from being any better. Allis McKay can trust her experience, but her trust is passive, so she never grasps, never transforms; never needing a method beyond her trust, she never attains one. But what she worked to get right she got right, and it rings true and clear and bright.

Moving out of the Northwest only slightly, we come to Thomas Savage of Montana, who is perhaps the most striking instance among my authors of the uses and disasters that are liable to accompany the unknown. Savage, now nearing sixty, is the author of seven novels, and if he hasn't one great book to show

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for his career, he has one that is very good indeed, and a number of others that are interesting. It is not easy to locate copies of his books, so if you do, buy or borrow them; even when he is not at his best, he is not dull. Savage has two great virtues, or rather, two versions of the same virtue operating on different scales. On the one hand, he is superb at destinies, at creating a sense that this life had to end up as it did; he is in no sense a determinist, but he does convey a fine sense of fatality, so that even in his lesser books he keeps the fatal end in view without being particularly portentous or foreshadowing. On the other hand, Savage is excellent at conveying the fixity, the unyieldingness of environments, the obduracy of the people and things in one's landscape, so that, given this person inside that environment, the result is destined. The first quality cannot be demonstrated without lengthy illustration, but the second yields itself to quotation:

> Once the three were inside the store (the teen-aged girls suppressed their giggles, the eyes of the boys were scornful, watchful) the tall dark wife began to handle and inspect a spongy head of lettuce from a crate on the counter. Under the very eyes of the painted peppery owner she tossed back the head of lettuce and held up another. She shrugged and dropped the second, plunk. She would have no lettuce.
>
> "All gone by," she said, loud enough for all to hear.
>
> There was a crackling silence, for she had flouted the owner, who considered the lettuce good enough to offer. Anyway, around there they didn't think much of people who always had to have lettuce. Before the development the owner never got lettuce in at all. Why, before the development there was a *lot* of stuff she never bothered with. This Pepperidge Farm bread, and garlic. They were always after garlic.

This is all there is to the store, but the relation of the owner to the tall dark wife, of old-timers used to cans, and newcomers from the development who want fresh lettuce and garlic, is all there, in a hundred words, and the economy of the writing assures us that this antagonism is irrevocable. Now, into that same development put a young wife, not the one in this scene, but one, rather, who shares the attitudes of the store owner. No lettuce, garlic, or Pepperidge Farm bread for her, but nothing else either; nothing she wants to do. Give to her, then, a husband whose virtue is kind-

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ness and all of whose other qualities are irritations, and you have the atmosphere of a life about to reach a totally unfulfilling climax. The husband catches the wife sleeping with another man, and he is fascinated, ignorant of causes, feeling only that it must be his fate to be a cuckold:

> Inevitably, she tried to smile. Her face, her nose especially, had the sharpness of someone very old. "Sheldon! He doesn't even love me!" And now behind that mad, vacant smile he saw the terror. "What will I do? What will become of me?"
>
> "Become of you?" He looked into her face and shook his head in a kind of innocent bewilderment. He spoke quietly, honestly. "I don't know."
>
> Then she began to weep.

He leaves, and we hear no more of the wife, nor need we, because, as far as Savage can see, her destiny is complete. Start with almost any set of details, and you can see in their fixity the way people will strain against them, but they must yield to their destinies, and, at his best, Savage's stories of these people are truly mysterious.

The passages above come from *Trust in Chariots* (Random House, 1961, out of print), one of the better books. The best one, the one fully successful novel, is *The Power of the Dog* (Little, Brown, 1968, out of print), a Western about two ranching brothers that does not falter once in its tremendous evocation of details and their power to articulate whole lives. The store described in the first passage quoted is in a Boston suburb, something Savage found out about relatively well along in life, which may make his sense of its details clear, but the urban landscapes of *Trust in Chariots* don't have the same haunting power as the Montana range in *The Power of the Dog*. He had tried in his first two novels, *The Pass* (Doubleday, 1944, out of print) and *Lona Hanson* (Simon & Schuster, 1948, out of print), to do Montana, as it were, but except for a wonderful rodeo sequence at the beginning of *Lona Hanson*, the landscape just isn't there yet, and so the destinies seem forced. But in *The Power of the Dog* we have five major characters, and for each there are tellingly characteristic objects and habits of life, so that when they clash in some grand climaxes, the objects all

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become supercharged with a marvelous sense of inevitability.*

Why women become alcoholics, why men madly put their trust in chariots or in horses, why some people cannot break out of self-created cages, why some lives become so possessed that they lose all ability to derive pleasure from the little things that make others content—these are the stories Thomas Savage knows. He is much better with men than with women, which is why *Lona Hanson* and *Daddy's Girl* (Little, Brown, 1970, in print, in paperback) are not so good as the two novels mentioned above. *Daddy's Girl* has lots of good details and vignettes, but it haggles and insists on Daddy's Girl's fate rather than evolving it, and manages to show, mostly, that there is a considerable difference between showing why masculine men fail and showing what makes a major woman's destiny. We will, later on, run into the question of what happens to a writer of talent when his or her work is consistently neglected or ignored; for now let it be said that Savage is a good writer, with a real body of work, one fine novel, and firsthand things to tell us about.

A note here. Although his work spans three decades, Savage's novels are very much of the fifties, and so remind one of a number of other novelists of the period who enjoyed or suffered similar fates. In the early fifties Oakley Hall earned some fame for *Corpus of Joe Bailey* (Viking, 1953, out of print). Hall is always a bit crude, and his highest estimate of human motives is no more than the wish to be good, but, like Savage, he can be very clear about destinies, and can be even better than Savage at knowing the stories to tell that play them out. In addition, there are sequences in Hall's work—driving a bulldozer in *So Many Doors,* the Berkeley scenes of *Joe Bailey,* bafflements about the relation of parent to child in *Mardios Beach*—that are memorable beyond the booming postwar California that is the milieu of these books. Hall, on the other hand, was seriously reviewed twenty years ago, and that cannot be said for the remarkable work of Davis Grubb and Richard

* I would be more detailed about *The Power of the Dog* were it not the focus of a forthcoming essay in *Colorado Quarterly* by Jack Brenner, who also reports that at a meeting of the country's experts on Western American literature no one had ever heard of Savage.

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Bissell. Grubb wrote *The Night of the Hunter* (Harpers, 1953, out of print), which was then made into a wonderful movie by James Agee and Charles Laughton, although that never seems to have made the novel at all well known. Grubb can be both pretentious and wearyingly sentimental, but he can also be haunting and exciting; I know no one who has not been frightened by parts of *The Night of the Hunter.* The major reason is Grubb's wonderful sense of the dreariness of the West Virginia landscape; in at least the first half of this book and in briefer sections of *The Voices of Glory* and *Shadow of My Brother,* Grubb invents a place, and a way of living to fit it, that is all his own, and unique. Bissell is lighter fare, also much less uneven, also best in his novels of the early fifties, also with a marvelous sense of place. *Stretch on the River* (1950), *High Water* (1954), and *7½ Cents* (1953), all Little, Brown, all out of print, are wonderfully durable books, funny, sweet, touching. The scene is the Mississippi, on the river, in a small town in Iowa; Bissell, never sure whether or not to take himself seriously, writes with a breezy freshness that bespeaks simple firsthand experience and offers no sense of Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson or Mark Twain. But *7½ Cents* was turned into *The Pajama Game,* which may have made Bissell rich and which may have contributed to his becoming an Easterner. Once out of his habitat, he dwindled rather quickly and rather badly. But the early novels are fine reading indeed.

Next, two novels that were totally unknown to me until fairly recently, and whose excellence has shamed me into realizing that there may be other good novels that I have never looked at because they are about historical figures. Henrietta Buckmaster's *And Walk in Love* (Random House, 1956, in print) and Gladys Schmitt's *Rembrandt* (Random House, 1961, in print) were published and advertised, I am quite sure, as the stuff of Literary Guild best sellers. They may even have been read as such, although it is hard to see how, for neither partakes for even a page of the metier of Irving Stone, Frank Yerby and Samuel Shellabarger. It may well be that an almost sure formula for remaining unknown is to write a serious historical novel; who will believe it isn't *Desirée* or *Din-*

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ner at Antoines? So far as I know, only Mary Renault is consistently read as a serious historical novelist.

And Walk in Love is based on the life of Saint Paul, and surely no one is more apt to be repellant to novel readers than he. Novels demand flexibility and generosity; Paul is insistent and dogmatic. He is reputed to have given Christianity not only its fame but a fatally wrong direction, and he certainly provides a wonderful target for anyone who wants to hate Christianity, or, perhaps, any religion. Yet Henrietta Buckmaster makes all that, even if true, mostly irrelevant, and she does it not by fudging the issue but by being extremely diligent and chaste. There is none of the history-in-the-making heart-thumping of *Ben Hur* or *The Silver Chalice,* and nothing either of that phony wisdom that finds the real heroes to be Barabbas or Judas or Pilate. One neither learns nor cares if Buckmaster is herself a Christian. What she has done is to brood, to take Acts and Paul's letters and let them evoke her hero, so that nothing in this quite long novel is not mentioned or easily allowed for in the New Testament itself. In her source the characters, as is well known, tend to lie pretty flat on the page, and Buckmaster, without altering a detail, broods, presses a little here, fills in a landscape there, and the story comes to quiet, shimmering life. Perhaps her greatest success comes early in the novel, when she gives herself one invention—that Saul knew and loved Stephen the martyr—and then shows Saul persecuting the Nazarenes out of torment and the need to believe in some absolute truth. He is, thus, quite ready for the vision on the road to Damascus when it comes. It does not turn his life around, only clarifies it, sets it on its true path, the one he had long been seeking. No one believes in either visions or conversions who does not want so to believe, that is Buckmaster's assurance, and it gives her her strength, her sense of the kind of love this forbidding man could feel, the kind of trouble he would have with those who wanted to keep Christianity a Jewish sect, and the very different troubles he would have with those Gentiles who just wanted to be converted to something. There's not a cinemascopic moment in the novel, although the fact that the title is taken from Ephesians does not keep it from being an unfortunate one; there is none of the ordinary historical novelist's

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fatal need to explain the unexplainable with decoration in details. The world that Paul moves in is there, clear enough at all events, because he himself is clear. The writing is undistinguished, but it is always diligent and serviceable, a rather plain rhetoric that is sufficiently like Paul's own that when he speaks words we all recognize as his we can read without embarrassment. Her Paul really does say that faith, hope and love abide, these three, and she makes us feel that he might well have said just that, when he does, in the situation that she provides. The characters are sculpted, and so rather stiff, but that stiffness is Henrietta Buckmaster's dignity. She needs it, and justifies it.

There's nothing particularly chaste or dignified about *Rembrandt*, which is a huge and lavish book. Gladys Schmitt really does imagine that she was there, familiar with the streets and houses of Amsterdam and Leyden, with the commerce and politics of being a painter, an apprentice, a master of apprentices. We have seasons and weather here, richly described rooms and faces. What makes *Rembrandt* so much brighter and thingier than *And Walk in Love* is precisely its fidelity to its source. As Buckmaster has brooded on biblical texts, Schmitt has on paintings and etchings. The book is best on Rembrandt at work, Rembrandt taking the people around him and making them St. Peter and Aristotle and Danaë, Rembrandt's rapacity in being able throughout a long career to do just that, to see everything as the subjects of his works. He emerges as a great bear, insolent, warm, sensual, often naïve, convinced of his greatness, never capable of or interested in removing that greatness from the world he moved in. It is a book to read with a book of reproductions open at all times right alongside.

Perhaps the most remarkable fact about *Rembrandt* is that it succeeds very well despite one major shortcoming: Gladys Schmitt does not know why Rembrandt is one of the greatest of painters. Having rightly insisted on the rootedness of his provinciality, having seen how much she could learn about his world just by looking closely at his work, she can't reverse the process and imagine how and why the result is as magnificent as it is. Fortunately, what she cannot do she does not try to do; fortunately too, Rembrandt's absorption in his life is so enormous and so fully rendered that

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we do not miss what we most long for except at rare, if crucial, moments. For it does not slight Rembrandt to make him so rooted in his world. Wherever the mystery of his genius resides, it is in the way his almost complete self-assurance released him into seeing others with a rich sense of their uniqueness even while he was being careless in his relations with them, even while struggling to find a life that could make him truly indifferent to the pettiness of so much that surrounded him. So he is tied to his world, passive even, yet remote, alone. The figure Schmitt creates is almost totally convincing—until one asks why Rembrandt is not Hals, or Brueghel, but one of the very greatest. Still, *Rembrandt* is 650 big pages long, and never anything but episodic, yet totally engrossing to read and vivid and bright in the memory.

These two books are the only ones of their authors I have yet been able to read. Henrietta Buckmaster has written a number of other novels, one on Shakespeare, one on a secretary general of the United Nations, that I have been unable to locate. Gladys Schmitt has written a whole host of books. Her first novel, *The Gates of Aulis* (1942), according to *Twentieth Century Authors,* was widely and seriously reviewed, although not always favorably. But after that she took to writing historical fiction, and as a result seems simply to have dropped from any sustained consideration. It is a pity that we seem quite able to read the historical novels of Scott, Tolstoy, Mann, Isaac Bashevis Singer, perhaps a few others, yet remain convinced that the fact that most historical novels are trashy makes it an inferior type; most novels of any type are trashy, after all. It was good to see Gore Vidal speaking out on this subject in a recent issue of the *New York Review of Books.* Judging by *Rembrandt,* I would not advise anyone to try Gladys Schmitt's work as bedtime reading; her intention and talent are far too serious for that.

Last, I want to mention some books that fall into a category that may be at least as capable as historical fiction of begetting oblivion, namely, the early novels of writers who turn out to write only one or two. We have, well up in the upper reaches of my pyramid, Joseph Heller and Ralph Ellison, which is to say we

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have *Catch-22* and *Invisible Man,* with little prospect of more from either writer. It is possible, thus, to become and to stay famous as the result of just one book, but it is rare and unlikely. Since first novels tend to have more heat than light, more suggestion than achievement, one wants more. Yet there can be good or bad reasons why one novel is all we get: failure to find a publisher, failure to be able to write more than one good autobiographical novel, desire to do something else. And so the first novel tends to get lost and never found again. I think of Floyd Salas, author of *Tattoo the Wicked Cross* (Grove, 1967, out of print), a seared and searing book about a boy in a reform school. Salas is so completely inside his experience that what in many other novels is treated as sensational lore is here only the setting for the boy's experience. The moment the doors are locked behind him, the boy has nothing but his tenaciously held street codes of honor to remind him of who he was and is, but those codes are precisely what dooms him when he confronts the brutalities of the reformatory. First the outside world fades, then the officials prove ineffectual, then the other boys are divided into the strong and the weak, so the hero, with his code of never squealing, is left alone to face a group of brutal and much stronger boys; the result is an awful homosexual rape, about which Salas will let us know only the hero's hurt and humiliation. He has trusted the truth of his experience to give him the truth of his novel, and it has not failed him. Salas has, so far as I know, written nothing after *Tattoo the Wicked Cross;* perhaps he has nothing else to write, but this book should not have been allowed to disappear.

Even stranger is the case of Rudolph von Abele and *The Party* (Houghton Mifflin, 1963, out of print). This was not his first novel, but *The Vigil of Emmeline Gore,* published the year before *The Party,* is totally unattainable, and the two represent the sum of von Abele's fictional output. But almost twenty years before these novels he wrote a biography of Alexander Stephens and some years after the novels a book on Hawthorne; at one time or another I know I've seen some poems of his in magazines. How, from this, to imagine *The Party,* a novel that can quickly be described as being about Hermann Göring and by Henry James? It is a wonderful

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tour de force, and if it doesn't reread so well as it reads, that is in part due simply to one's amazement the first time that such a book could exist. It takes 400 pages to describe the events of one evening with, obviously, great slowness and concentration. The matter is the experience of an army colonel who, late in the war, is beginning to learn of the horrors of the camps, who is only meagerly able to understand his own meager life, and who is invited to a party at the Marshal's chateau in Austria. It is one of those books that is marred by its author's decision to "do something," in this case name everyone except the hero by role: the Pastor, the Superintendent, the Businessman, et cetera. But the gallery is vivid, and the slow stupefaction of the coming defeat of the Reich brings out the interesting worst in everyone, except for the Marshal, huge, splendidly selfish and cruel, who decides to be nice to the hero because the hero has been reticent and detached toward him. Halfway through the book is a chamois hunt by moonlight in the mountains, in which von Abele brilliantly catches the crisscrossings of the suddenly revealed temperaments of people who are strangers to each other. And the night goes on—like most real parties, unlike most fictional ones, the late, anticlimactic moments are important, quietly, carefully described, as the officer realizes he has been implicated in the Marshal's baiting of him, caught in his own refuge of silence to hide his fear, to offer a mask of moral superiority. At the end:

> Nothing would interpose to make commitment easier; know what he might, he could foresee himself already, sitting in the greasy armchair in his rented, cluttered room, revolving endlessly the difficulties of rebellion, which he also saw would be compounded now that he had come to know and, for a time, almost to love the Marshal. Perhaps the war would end somehow, and by ending would relieve him of the anguish of decision, and also of the anguish of the knowledge that he seemed, especially after this adventure, perfectly, Platonically incapable of making a decision. If he had been in the habit of praying, he would have prayed for the end of the war.

There have been lots of novels that have tried in one way or another to rework the central proposition of Kafka's *The Trial,* and the more self-consciously they have done this, like *1984* or *Player*

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Piano, the less well they have worked. Von Abele seems nowhere near so interesting a man as George Orwell, and may be no more talented than Kurt Vonnegut, but *The Party* repays one for its slowness, compensates for its lugubriousness, by the density with which it evokes a real relationship between the Big Man and the Little Man, shows how a single night can clarify if not alter the course of a whole lifetime, and in so doing poses all the implicit moral and political issues in a truly imagined world.

I have closed with Salas and von Abele because it is the most convenient way to bring me down a little closer to the present. Earlier I disqualified recent books from the present discussion because it seemed to me that subsequent work by a number of writers might begin to earn them the wide audience that their first novels did not seem to gain. But what if these first, or second novels, are, for whatever reason, all there is to be? They will almost certainly vanish, in five or ten years be as assuredly unknown to any reading public as Allis McKay or Thomas Savage are now. I think, mostly, of Theodore Weesner's *The Car Thief,* published a year ago, which seems to me the best American novel I have read since, say, *Herzog.* It wasn't, by the usual standards, ignored, but neither was it widely acclaimed, and since it is a very slow and painful book to read, it just may not make its way in the world. Its subject is not very much different from Floyd Salas's, except that most of the action takes place outside the reformatory, but it is much better than Salas's simply because, whatever his actual personal relationship to the young car thief, Weesner is triumphant and not just compellingly honest with his story; Salas tends to blurt out his pain, and Weesner knows when to blurt out, when to back off, and the cumulative effect of his apparently simple sentences is sometimes staggering. If Weesner goes on writing, I trust he will be recognized, but if not, someone ought to make sure to buy a hundred remaindered copies of *The Car Thief* to give away as presents. I think, too, of a novel by James Guetti, called *Action,* which, much more than Weesner's novel, is in danger of disappearing without ever having been seen, and if it does, it would be hard to blame Guetti for shutting up or turning to hackwork. *Action* is the best novel I know about gambling,

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and indeed is so much better than most that the others cease to count. Furthermore, it has a grand opening sequence that is, by itself, a first-rate short story, and, to boot, a wonderful indicator for any wary reader of what is in store.

One could go on. All the time that I have been reading, rereading and writing, I have been plagued with the sense that there are, first, other writers who for some reason I've misplaced in my memory, and, second, hundreds of other books that I'll never read that may be, for all I or perhaps anyone knows, as good as any of those I've mentioned, or the next Roth or Updike.* There is, for some at least, great joy in writing, in imagining a fiction, a full story, and it may well be that the joy of the writing is enough and what happens to it after it is in print doesn't really matter. But while this may well be true for a novel or two for many writers, the evidence is quite strong that continued neglect demands its payments. Many give up, and quite a few who go on get worse, as my early-fifties novelists can show. What makes any person, or any person's talent, continue to develop and grow is of course a mystery, but I know of no instance where it can be said that a writer has thrived because he or she has remained unknown. Perhaps the one way neglect seems to hurt most novelists is with the prose, line by line. Most first and second novels, no matter how strongly conceived, are underwritten or overwritten, often considerably. In the absence of an audience, especially an intelligent critical audience, these defects tend to go uncorrected, perhaps because they are never properly recognized. My guess is that lonely writers hug their conceptions to themselves, nurture their stories and characters with wounded pride, but rather ignore the moment-to-moment quality of their writing. Almost all the writers that I have discussed read better than short quotations can reveal. Of course premature adulation and fame can hurt, too; this, I am convinced, has proved to be the case with Roth and perhaps with

* To wit, Janet Lewis, gifted with an almost scary neat and tidy prose, author of two fine novels, *The Wife of Martin Guerre,* short, tricky, nasty, haunting; *The Ghost of Monsieur Scarron,* long, violent, evocative. Both are set in seventeenth-century France. Also, Maureen Howard's *Bridgeport Bus,* a very sad and funny novel about a smart, dowdy single woman who discovers admirable ways to accept life as she busily tells us how it ought to be better than it is. I've passed these books among friends—until someone forgot to return them—and have never had a disappointed reader.

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Updike too, but those are the rare fates, after all. Much commoner are those we can discern only as questions: What happened to Richard Dohrman? Why did Clara Winston not go on, or, why did Richard Gehmann settle for writing for *TV Guide*? Did Dexter Masters ever write anything after *The Accident*? To ask such questions is to begin to think that it isn't very much worthwhile once more to go out and measure the size of the ego or the achievement of Norman Mailer.

For, of course, it is not just the writers that suffer from being unknown, but the rest of us as well. The novelists themselves, after all, may be living on quite happily in oblivion, but anyone who has known the experience of a book that remains memorable knows also that one cannot have too many such experiences. Of course there are lots of things to read besides novels, and lots to do besides read. But the very fact that there are so many good unknown novelists, that at any moment of the day hundreds of novels are being conceived and written and rewritten, shows that it is still our form, our major literary way of saying who we are, and why. One only wishes life were somehow different enough so that the books we should read, the books that could be memorable, could always be announced to us. It is part of our great abundance that we have so much, written in our lifetimes and within a single genre, that is worth knowing. It is the curse of that same abundance that we may never begin to know the extent of our riches.

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American Scholar Forum . . . . . .

Ethnicity and Education: Pluralism and Tradition

Foreword

The editors of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR are the more pleased to present this forum, if such it may be called, because it fell together seemingly by chance—one of those fortunate happenings that make putting together a number of the magazine always an interesting experience.

It is not really by chance, however, that these issues are on the minds of so many people. At more than one recent meeting of the SCHOLAR's Editorial Board, the subject of spirited discussion has been the troubling evidence of a deep divisiveness in our society, along with the denigration of what used to be called, without apology, "the humanities." One member of the Board suggested that the real questions are: Is there a common learning? Is there a common society? Are there common values?

These are questions that have been around for a long time, but there are periods in history when they present themselves with more than usual insistence. The apocalypse that the sixties seemed to promise (or threaten, dependent upon one's point of view) has not materialized, and there is still time for a reassessment, time to look for some answers to those old hard questions.

In an earlier article for the SCHOLAR [Winter, 1971/72], Irving Howe wrote:

The idea of historical and cultural continuity has always been under attack in the United States, at times by philistines of the Right and

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more recently by philistines of "relevance" who suppose themselves on the Left. . . . In the coming decade this commitment to cultural continuity will be a prime obligation for intellectuals who take their calling seriously, for teachers truly responsible to their students, and for those intellectuals and teachers who care to work for a better society.

So it was not really by chance that the SCHOLAR staff, as well as the Editorial Board, was receptive to articles that dealt with the problems of historical and cultural continuity. It was not until after we had accepted four of the following articles, however, that we began to see interesting resonances, correspondences, and to think of the four as a group. We sent Mr. Howe's article to Michael Novak, who responded with the fifth article, "One Species, Many Cultures." We present a forum then, in which none of the writers speaks from quite the same framework as any of the others, nor to exactly the same question. We hope that our readers will find in this exploration what many of our writers hope to find in our society—a creative, rather than divisive, variety.

CAROL BRANN

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Living with Kampf and Schlaff

Literary Tradition and Mass Education

IRVING HOWE

Our culture seems unable to stay with a serious or even an unserious concern for any length of time; we flit from topic to topic, sensation to sensation. Two years ago I was debating Professor Louis Kampf on whether the academic study of literature was a strategem for reinforcing class oppression; today, the announcement of this subject is likely to bring a smile. The insurgent segments of our English departments seem to have accomplished little more than to arrange for some disgraceful freshman anthologies and provoke among many of their colleagues a relapse into old-style academicism. One can almost hear some professors breathing a sigh of relief: the barricades have not been stormed, familiar lines of authority survive, we can fall back into old ways.

Which old ways? With caricature aforethought, let me imagine Professor Schlaff, the polar opposite of Professor Kampf. He is an academic in the popular sense—a scholar characterized by too great an ease with his materials and perhaps by lack of ease with anything else. In the portion of literature that he "covers," he finds little that seems troublesome, problematic, threatening. The explosive intent and, sometimes, subversive consequence of the Word concern him less than the kinds of placement and classification for which he has been trained. He shows little restlessness of spirit, such as would drive him to ask vexing questions about the relationship between his scholarly work and the strange sources in the outer world from which literature reaches him.

What is Professor Schlaff's approach to literature? It really does not matter: he comes to us as historical scholar, formalist, myth-man, structuralist, even Marxist. But whichever it may be, he settles comfortably into the inner business of his business. Sometimes he writes for advanced magazines, sometimes he edits recondite texts, but always as an agent of *Schläferei*.

He can be a useful scholar. What he does is necessary for keeping alive the tradition of literary learning. If faced with the choice between Kampf and Schlaff, anti-intellectual bravado and unintellectual dullness, we cannot hesitate for long: Schlaff is not devoted to setting fires, either literally or metaphorically. Yet it would be unfortunate if, through weariness with the turmoil of Kampf, we succumbed to the torpor of Schlaff. For especially at this moment in our cultural history, Professor Schlaff is not an adequate model for students, critics, scholars. Nor does his record in American academic life warrant any large confidence.

Until his displacement by the New Criticism, Professor Schlaff was often the domi-

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nant power in our English departments. His reign was marked by strict historical and linguistic demands upon his students, although an uncertain grasp of his texts; he trained students well in everything except, perhaps, the substance and value of literature. If his approach was often well-grounded historically, it could also be locked into a sterile hermeticism, so that literary history seemed to become "autotelic" in the sense that some critics have wanted literature itself to be.

The years of his control over English departments were marked by a genteel social exclusiveness, sometimes worse. When Lionel Trilling decided in the thirties to become a professor of literature, "my friends thought me naïve to the point of absurdity, nor were they wholly wrong—my appointment in Columbia College was pretty openly regarded as an experiment, and for some time my career in the College was complicated by my being Jewish." For it seemed doubtful to Professor Schlaff that young men deriving from eastern European families could apprehend "the Anglo-Saxon spirit" that permeated English literature; and indeed, it was not until after World War II that a significant number of such men found their way into our more elevated English departments. Had Professor Schlaff been asked about black students, he would have replied that he had no objection to seeing a colored boy in his class, provided, of course, you could find a qualified one. That is pretty much what he still says today.

How little he could cope with current traumas became clear in the late sixties. Assaulted by mindless cries of "relevance," he often found himself at a loss, reaffirming eternal verities but rarely able to stand up against the new assaults. And this deficiency was due not to lack of intelligence but to the fact that he had little taste or capacity for general ideas or responsiveness to the troubles of our time. What he said was that he just wanted to be allowed to do his own work; a kindly colleague would have agreed that it was desirable to have some professors who remain deaf to the clatter of crisis; a less kindly colleague would have remarked that there is an easy descent from the virtue of detachment to the vice of indifference. I would have said both.

Now, before a segment of my audience rises to protest that I have created an unjust caricature, that there have been narrow scholars with broad interests, and that some of Schlaff's colleagues were men of social conscience every bit as acute as yours or mine, I will bow to these objections in advance. But a caricature announced as caricature must be unjust; the only question is whether it is useful. I think it is. Professor Schlaff merits notice because we must convince impatient students that he has a valued place in the academy, and because we need also to recall that it would be a disaster if he were to gain or regain dominance in the academy.

Were our conservative ideologues right in foreseeing a period of social repose and intellectual rest, then it might not be so bad for Schlaff to regain power. But whatever else awaits us, we can be reasonably certain that it will not be social repose and intellectual rest. The very enterprise of education is in a state of such deep confusion that even without external pressures—even if we were not to ask what social and moral ends education now serves, or what responsibilities it should assume toward deprived racial groups—even then we would have to expect continued turmoil.

Until some point in the nineteenth century, the humanist conception of education still envisaged a kind of Platonic society divided into two castes, the first consisting of people who worked with their hands and the second of people with enough leisure to devote themselves to the refinements of culture. In the nineteenth century, however, there appeared two revolutionary ideas of education, one emerging out of the democratic upheavals in France and America, the other out of the socialist movement. Both of these were necessarily marked by ambivalence toward traditional kinds of education: they saw it as a rationalization for the power of a ruling class but also as a valued heritage that the masses had been unjustly deprived of. Some liberal demo-

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crats succumbed to contempt for the "dead past," some socialists to contempt for "bourgeois culture." But there were also the wiser persuasions of Melville and Whitman that the mission of America was to absorb and transcend European culture and of Marx that the workers must "conquer" and elevate traditional culture. Matthew Arnold, distant from both of these outlooks yet impelled by conscience to struggle with the same problems, made

> [writes Northrop Frye] a remarkable attempt to separate the ideal of leisure and cultivation from the members of the dominant class who embody it. . . . Arnold gives the primary place to the study of the classics, though only because he thinks of them much as William Morris thinks of the arts of design, as the living powers of imagination that transform a class-ridden society into a classless one.

It is in the vicinity of these assumptions that we should try to locate our work as teachers and scholars. The enterprise of education assumes some social and moral norms by means of which to strive and in behalf of which to fall short; and I do not see that it is possible or defensible at this moment to propose any educational ideal other than that of trying to bring together a commitment to, first, the widespread diffusion of learning and, second, the preservation of the highest standards of learning. We may yet have to conclude that these two values are incompatible, but we are still very far from being able to know—although we have gone far enough to see that between egalitarianism and traditionalism there is, at the very least, an extreme tension.

With that tension, we shall have to live. The project of mass education declares each citizen to be entitled to a college education and soon may enable him to have one. Who can fault this project? Or deny that so far the results have been mixed and troubling? Those of us who advocated a universalization of culture were not, I think, wrong; but we were probably ingenuous in our sense of how readily or at what cost it might be brought about. In the short and perhaps the long run there occurs a wrenching conflict between high culture and universal education, to both of which we are devoted and between which we would hardly know how to choose.

In any case, there is no going back to the elitist position. Retreats there certainly will be: one is just around the corner. Professors who suppose that we soon will be done with the nuisance of trying to teach "all those people" can expect quick relief but final disappointment. If, for instance, the deceits and inflated claims associated with open enrollment in the City University of New York help evoke a backlash, we can expect that a decade later there will be still another and perhaps more serious version of the open enrollment policy.

To talk about these matters is far easier than to act on them with good conscience. Adaptations are needed in the classroom; and I have no patience with those harrumphing Old Humanists who shield themselves behind the armor of "standards" without caring to extend a hand of help to young people who bear the stigmata of decades, centuries of American outrage. There have been adaptations in the past: what may now be regarded as unalterable standards would have been seen by our predecessors as concessions to the mob. The idea of a tradition, the concept of a classic, the imperatives of historical imagination, the judgment that there is a body of great works comprising the Western tradition and that an educated person ought to have some acquaintance with them—these are absolutes of our profession. But how we interpret and apply them at this moment is something else again.

A few simple examples. At many colleges, English departments have given up the historical survey of English literature as a basic introductory course and have substituted for it a variety of genre courses. This seems to me an unhappy development, yet for the time being there may be no alternative. Under no conditions, however, would I assent to proposals for removing serious texts from the already unsatisfactory genre courses and instead using "communications" or "relevant" materials. That is no longer a compromise, it is a surrender.

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Along the same lines, I would fight hard to maintain in every college a required composition course, even more valuable for those students who can write than for those who cannot.

These examples are easy. Our difficulties arise in the day-to-day life of teaching, and they arise less as precise decisions of policy than as groping improvisations in the classroom. I am convinced that, finally, there is not much that can be done to remove these difficulties: all quick solutions must be suspect. The honest truth, to use a wonderful colloquialism, is that we can hold to the general end of yoking together the values of egalitarianism and the values of learning, yet at any given moment be unable to do very much in behalf of that end. Coming smack up against this painful truth, every one of us wants to cry *Help!* since we all hunger after instant remedies, tricks, magic. Cry *Help!* if it helps you, but recognize that it will not help very much in facing our difficulties. To be a responsible teacher means to be torn apart by conflicting and equally urgent demands—perhaps to recognize, with Max Scheler, that tragedy arises "when the idea of 'justice' appears to be leading to the destruction of higher values."

There remains an important problem concerning the relationship between minority subcultures, racial and/or ethnic, and the dominant culture that we call Western. Some academics are content with the formalism of a seemingly unimpeachable stand: they applaud "equality of opportunity," they will receive qualified students of any race, creed or color, and they propose to bend neither backward nor forward. This view, despite its seeming liberalism, neglects the crucial fact that anything like equality of opportunity is impossible when the circumstances of competing groups are so radically different, indeed, when sociocultural deprivations are so deeply ingrained that formal equality of opportunity may have little effect but to perpetuate existing inequalities of condition.

Another, yet curiously linked, view sometimes heard in the academy from both right and left, reflects uneasiness as to the "laying on" of culture onto disadvantaged groups; a fear is expressed that this will deprive them of the strengths of their own experience and traditions. In literary discussion this view often rests on an untenable analogy with the English experience where for about two centuries there has been a vital working-class subculture. But look as one will, there are really no equivalents in the United States, except perhaps in a few isolated industries; the cultural experience of the American workers has, for good or bad, not been sharply demarcated from that of the country as a whole. It would be hard to conclude that in trying to bring the children of American workers into a relationship with Western culture we are cutting away their own cultural roots.

More serious is the claim made for the distinctiveness of ethnic and racial subcultures, ranging from black to Yiddish. That these subcultures contain attractive elements that merit study and preservation; that to young people who grow up in them the effort to connect with the larger, cosmopolitan culture can bring feelings of pain and dislocation; that for those of us who have come out of such subcultures there must always be some sense of "difference," even alienation, from the dominant Western tradition, a sense of difference that can yield moral correction and emotional enrichment—all this seems to me true and urgent. Yet, in the final analysis, the survival of ethnic and racial subcultures depends mostly on whether those who grow up in them believe it valuable to preserve them. The host culture, resting as it does on the English language and the literary traditions associated with it, has every obligation to be responsive to infusions of vitality and diversity from subcultures; every reason to be sympathetic to the problems of those who, from choice or necessity, may live with the tensions of biculturalism; yet it would be a dreadful form of intellectual condescension—and social cheating as well—if, in the name of the autonomy of subcultures, we were to dissuade their members from trying to establish deep connec-

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tions with the culture in which they are going to live.

II

The sense of crisis that hovers over the English professoriat stems not merely from social pressures, but also from the inner development of our culture as it has moved these past one hundred fifty years through and beyond the problematic terrain of modernism. Even with the best of our students, one senses more and more a phenomenon I would call *the pastness of the past,* how the accumulating historical distinctiveness of our lives seems to drive a wedge between ourselves and our culture. It's hardly a novelty to say that we're living at a turning point in the cultural experience of the West, one that is momentous enough even in regard to what we can understand of it. Insofar, for example, as English literature rests on norms, premises, beliefs and even memories of the Christian-classical tradition, we may suppose that a reader who has grown up in our largely post-Christian culture will find himself increasingly tone-deaf to the works of the past, even as he may know and admire them.

But this turning of Western culture has implications that seem to go deeper still, implications we find hard to grasp or put into words. Implications, say, that point to so radical a shift in the terms of moral perception as to call into question the very idea of moral continuity; or that may invoke a fundamental mutation in our sense of human existence.

Both what we can and cannot grasp in this turning of our culture constitute major reasons for our growing difficulties in teaching literature. To the sensitive teacher it must sometimes seem as if he were dealing with a language the very terms and root premises of which are decreasingly available to his students. Imagine, if you can, Matthew Arnold writing an essay on *Last Tango in Paris* or Dr. Johnson on *Naked Lunch.* Would not even these two great critics find themselves beset by moral vertigo if they had to confront such works? Between Dr. Johnson and Arnold there were major shifts of literary premise and taste; but between the two of them and our present culture (as even perhaps between the whole of Western literary life from Aristotle to Eliot and the present), there are far more radical shifts.

The historical disintegration of Christianity, about which one may be permitted mixed feelings, is relatively easy to deal with; far more troublesome are those tacit values and experiential biases for which Christianity often served as the historical carrier but which were by no means confined to it.

Our difficulties as teachers are not simply of an order such as, say, the fact that students unacquainted with the Bible will find some portions of *Moby Dick* opaque: that is bad enough, but we can at least tell them who Ishmael was. It is when the animating terms and assumptions of a literary work become inaccessible or lose the power to excite strong responses that our difficulties really become severe. Every teacher has had the experience of struggling with a book like *The Scarlet Letter* or *Anna Karenina* or sometimes *Clarissa,* the kind of book that assumes the presence of readers who know and can feel the urgency behind the Christian view of adultery. Our students, by contrast, grow up in a culture that tells them, insofar as it says anything at all on such matters, that they should engage in sexual experiment when "they are emotionally ready for it." My interest here is not in making judgments, but in measuring distances. Between Clarissa's view that dishonor is worse than death and the mottoes of contemporary liberation, what possible bridge can there be? How can someone raised in our culture register—not merely acknowledge—the urgency of the traditional moral view?

Oh, our students learn what to say, and some of them can even speak about "sin." But in truth, what can that word mean to them? What can Clarissa's problem really signify? To those of us over forty, the traditional moral view has at least the urgency of something remembered, perhaps something we believe to have spoiled our youth. But for those who cannot even remember the memory?

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We have our answers. We speak for the value of the historical imagination, and it is good that we do so. But the historical imagination is notoriously tricky: if it can persuade us of the need to take a leap into the past, without which the classics of literature become inaccessible, it can also persuade us how hazardous and unlikely such leaps may become. Professor Schlaff—he again!—doesn't worry much about this problem, since he lives neither in the present nor the past.

Raising this matter in a recent discussion with students, I was met with an answer that seemed to me as good as we are likely to find, yet also not finally satisfying. We "translate," a student said, from one moral vocabulary to another. Clarissa's obsession with virginity—but notice how that ready-made phrase betrays my historical provincialism, marking me as the creature of this moment—Clarissa's belief in the sanctity of her virginity is hard for us to grasp in its own terms, certainly hard to credit with the kind of emotional energy she brings to it; but if, continued my student, we transpose it into other terms—say, a commitment to personal integrity—we can grasp and honor that belief. I suppose that in effect we do something of this kind. But consider what a wrenching it involves: Clarissa sees her virginity not as "symbolic" of a psychic or moral condition, not as a mere outer reflection of inner integrity; she believes, as a Christian woman, that integrity is realized through maintaining her purity. And insofar as we have to "translate" her belief into our terms, we necessarily distort and weaken.

It may be asked, however, whether there is really anything new about this problem. Has it not always been true that the literature of the past is seen through the distorting lens of the present? How else did the eighteenth century read the Romans or the nineteenth Shakespeare? And may not our sense of the problem be rendered excessively acute because of the homely fact that we now confront unusually large numbers of ill-prepared students?

These are cogent questions, and I shall not pretend to answer them fully. But I think a full answer would elaborate on the following points: that, yes, the history of literary taste is partly a history of distortions effected through the pressures of the contemporary; nevertheless, such distortions within the span of the Christian tradition must have been less disruptive, less akin to a deep mutation, than those that occur after the end of Christian hegemony; that there is reason to take seriously the claim, despite the cheap exploitation to which it has been put, that a qualitative transformation of Western culture threatens the survival of literature as we have known it; and that the presence of large numbers of ill-prepared students in our classrooms is itself a crucial instance of the kind of problems I have been raising.

It is hard to speak with any assurance about such large and necessarily imprecise matters; and it is better not to. I suppose we can detect some significance in the fact that there are already voices in the academy proposing to shake off the burdens of culture, mind, history and guilt.

My own conviction remains that the heritage of the past forms the substance of the present, and that for mediating between the voices of generations, literary criticism, whether on paper or in the classroom, serves a central function as defender of whatever civilization we have or may yet have. If my sense of things is even a little correct, then we can expect no rest, nothing but anxiety, doubt, struggle, all conditions with which neither Professor Kampf nor Professor Schlaff can help us very much. For those of us who are in, or into, the profession of teaching, only the most acute historical awareness and the keenest social affections may bring some light to our days.

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One Species, Many Cultures

MICHAEL NOVAK

Bounded by the slow Danube River on the south and by the rugged Carpathian Mountains on the north, the ancestral land of the Slovak people lies at the axis of Western civilization. For centuries, the vast armies of Attila, Genghis Khan, the Turks, the Germans and the Russians have risen like a tide toward Europe and in due course have been broken in or near the mountains of Slovakia. In the ninth century, Saints Cyril and Methodius established there the Byzantine influence of the Cyrillic alphabet and the Old Slavonic liturgy; but ambitious German rulers later imposed the Latin language, in order to draw Slovakia back toward the West. The rivers of Slovakia run southward and the cultivation of grapes makes Slovakia a wine-drinking nation; the sensibility of the Slovaks is partly Mediterranean and partly Nordic. For two thousand years, the Slovak people, often to their woe, have abhorred large governmental units and preferred local rule. For a thousand years they have endured almost unbroken political oppression.

Just before the Johnstown flood of 1889, one of my grandfathers came from Slovakia to the United States; within a few years, all three of my other grandparents had done the same. During the thirty-nine years from 1875 to 1914, nearly a third of the population of Slovakia emigrated. They left from sheer hunger, to escape military conscription in the hated Hungarian army, to find some way to break the political oppression of Hungarian "magyarization,"* and to fulfill the ancient Slovak legends and myths of freedom.

The Slovaks, like many other Slavs, tend to be suspicious of governments, activism and politicians. "Every official has a tail, to sweep in goods," runs a Slovak proverb. Better to concentrate on home, family and work. No other Slavic people is so inventive in song; over fifteen thousand folk songs of the Slovaks have been catalogued, and a Slavic saying goes: "See a Slovak, hear a song." Nearly all the arts of the Slovaks focus on the home.

The great Slovak names Svatopluk, Janošik, Benovsky and Štéfanik mean little to most Americans. But this is only to say that an ordinary American education is remarkably ethnocentric. About one-third of our population is of Anglo-Saxon ancestry. Yet so far is our nation from fulfilling its own pluralistic destiny that our education is almost entirely Anglo-American. (Indeed, not even all social classes, religious traditions, or regions of Anglo-Americans are equally represented in our educational cultures—"rednecks," evangelicals, Appalachians, for example.) Perhaps the dominance of Anglo-Saxon ethnocentrism in the past necessitates its continued dominance; it has shaped our history. Every American should learn about and, to some extent, assimilate English political history and literature. But is a virtually total con-

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* From 1896 to 1908, 508 Slovaks were arrested and convicted for using the Slovak language in public.

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centration on the upper-class culture based in the northeastern section of the nation a sufficient intellectual guide to actual American life, or to the character of the other cultures on this planet?

Not long ago, "the humanities" meant, not humanity, but "Western civilization." More than that, it meant "Western civilization as seen through English, Protestant, upper-class eyes." Not many of the graduates of Harvard, Princeton and Yale now in their fifties learned very much in their college days about the other cultures of the world—about Buddhism, or Slavic history, or Jewish family life, or Chinese civilization, or Latin America, or the history of slavery. What they were instructed in as "liberal arts" was not quite fully liberating; what passed before their eyes as "the humanities" was, rather astonishingly, a mirror image of their own ethnicity.

The phrase "our common culture" has in recent years been used with more glibness than hard reflection. A culture is not put on like a suit of clothes. One can mimic a culture, absorb it, even use it as a vehicle of one's own self-expression. If, however, the culture does not flow out of one's own tutored instincts and aspirations, it is not yet one's own and does not yet exhaust one's own intelligence, perceptions or dreams. So for many millions of immigrants and their descendants—for a majority of Americans—what is currently available as "mainstream culture" does not spring from the heart. Hundreds of thousands of freshmen tapping their feet in classrooms in Providence, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Miami, Houston and Los Angeles do *not* hear, in the voice of their professors, their own voices—and this is not only because of television, or a generation gap, or the collapsing of "the great tradition." The great tradition itself has been in America too narrowly, too ethnocentrically, perceived.

I concur, there *is* a great tradition. There is a "common" Western culture, distinct from other cultures. But ever since Kant, scholars have sought this tradition in a premature and inaccurately projected "universality." They have tried to emphasize what is *common* in all men, what is *universal,* those qualities in which we all share and are *alike,* those characteristics that do not *divide* but rather *unite* us. A laudable but grievously mistaken impulse.

A profound irony is involved in our common identity as members of the human species. The species to which we belong is a historical species; it possesses consciousness, and this consciousness is at once symbolic and concrete. That is, our species lives not only within the physical atmosphere surrounding this blue green planet but also within a variety of concrete, historical cultures. We are the species that lives within cultures—within spheres of meaning, sensibility, selective perception and patterned action. What we have in common is that we are diverse. Our diversity is proof that we are human. We are not so many ants crawling on a soundless orb, nor so many apes obeying laws of natural selection. We generate distinctive cultures. Within cultures, we develop endlessly complex, distinctive individuals. We live within symbolic worlds all our own, both as individuals and as cultures.

In the twentieth century (which is itself, a friend reminds me, a somewhat "culture-bound" concept), the relativity of each of our identities is borne in upon us because we inescapably encounter so many who differ from us. In this relativity we meet a second and novel kind of common identity. What we have in common are our finitude and interdependence. Our diversity does not mean we are intrinsically divided from each other, only that we are intrinsically different from each other. Our future unity lies not in "overcoming our differences" but in seeing how they are analogous: in learning to see that *my* struggle to become a moral human being is rather *like* (not the same as, only analogous to) *your* struggle to become a moral human being.

In a word, the way to become moral is not to become universal, but to become concrete. I need not become the same as you. But my struggle to realize my own moral identity—solely my own, concrete, unique—has many parallels to your struggle to realize your own identity. We face, for example, many similar obstacles: social

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inequities, ill fortune, self-deception, aging, death. How you face these obstacles in your life illuminates possibilities by which I may, allowing for our differences, conduct my life as well.

A nun may define her life around her chastity, as a chosen symbol of God's transcendent love; whereas I, a sensual man, may see in her struggles to protect virginity (of spirit and of flesh) illumination for the perplexities surrounding the central value by which I define my life. The world's literature opens up for me a world of analogy, where flashes of illumination ricochet in unpredictable patterns off a thousand mirrors. The critic of literature who reads Nietzsche after having learned from Goethe may catch different reflections from one who reads him after studying Russell, Hare and Austin.

What "the great tradition" concerns is wisdom, the voyages individuals take toward moral maturity and moral growth, and the analogous "stages on the way," the analogous "moves," the analogous "dilemmas," "ironies" and "tragedies" they encounter. These words, of course, are already heavy with cultural specificity; they conjure up Aeschylus, Kierkegaard, Hesse and a hundred German scholars. Still, every human life is a structuring of time; each begins with birth, each ends. "Voyage," therefore, is a universal motif. It is the kind of motif that allows for infinite variation, for concrete diversity, for cultural and personal uniqueness. Cultures structure time quite differently. Cultures imagine the model of human fulfillment differently. Yet in every culture individuals voyage from birth to death, and from moral beginnings to moral development.

Many of our present perplexities arise from two confusions: one is a misperception of class, the other a misperception of culture. Some young blacks from Hough may not be literate, but that does not mean that the basic human voyage is closed to them. Both the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *Soul on Ice* are classically Greek and Christian in the *metanoia* they narrate, and in the structure of decision and liberation they exhibit. (Note even their chapter headings.) It is a mistake to hold that the fundamental moral struggle is restricted to upper-class Anglo-Saxons—*or* to the "oppressed." Whatever one's social class, the struggle against self-deception (never decisively won), the struggle for clear vision, and the struggle to respect concrete human persons different from oneself is always present.

Bourgeois morality, the morality of appearances and proprieties, must be distinguished from fundamental human morality. "The habit doth not make the monk." One may be an attorney general of the United States without becoming a moral hero to whom others look for illumination on how to become a moral man. It is not easy to be moral simply because one is wellborn, nor simply because one is born in a slum. The voyage toward moral development in either case is analogous to the others—essentially different, yet sufficiently parallel to cast mutual illumination. No human life is so different from all others that it cannot shed morally profitable light; thus the fascination of stories even about moral monsters.

When a culture is highly articulated, a "cultivated" person is skilled both in discerning movements of the soul *and* in giving names to them. He will have a full range of references and allusions with which to speak of what he feels. It is not enough, for example, to be "an atheist." Like Sartre? Or like Merleau-Ponty? Or like Malraux? Or like Camus? Like John Dewey? Or like Corliss Lamont? Or like some churchgoer going through empty motions? The state of soul is remarkably various in every case.

Nevertheless, a lack of words does not necessarily indicate an incapacity of soul. It is true (it certainly seems true) that many persons are indeed shallow of soul and contemptuous of introspection. It does not necessarily follow that an abundance of words indicates greatness of soul, or poverty of words poverty of spirit. There are some professors, disdainful of the "cultural deprivation" of those they are obliged to instruct, who are sterile of soul; and in some of their students there are depths untongued.

Among some of the Indian chiefs of

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American history, for example, there is an eloquence, dignity and precision of speech worthy of the ancient Greeks. Or, to state the matter differently, some of the heroes of Homer utter sentiments worthy of the Indian nations. Want of reading does not disbar human beings from profound moral insight or from classical eloquence. One does not have to read Greek to encounter ancient wisdom. (The American Indians produced no Aristotle; neither has New York.)

On the other hand, a university education in the humanities today is *not* aimed at profound moral insight or classical eloquence. They are lucky indeed whose insight and eloquence are not destroyed by a university education today.

For the culture of the universities today is not the culture of "the great tradition," not the culture of Western civilization, not even the culture of upper-class Anglo-Americans. In some few persons, it may be these things. In most administrators, professors, teaching assistants and students a university education exhibits a different culture altogether. Let me call it "the culture of the professionals" and attempt to draw attention to its pervasiveness.

Not long ago, a major corporation took an ad in the *Wall Street Journal* to honor one of its employees. Above his picture was a single word, *"Professionalism . . ."* and below it a definition: *"More than education . . . More than experience . . . More than training . . . it's a state of mind."* Who today are proud to call themselves professionals? Football players, stockbrokers, doctors, lawyers, journalists, gangsters and professors of literature, philosophy and other fields. "Professionalism." "State of mind." These are terms of considerable power. Implied are choices, specializations, narrowings down for purposes of efficiency and effect. Implied, indeed, is the disciplining of an entire life, a concentration upon a limited field of expertise. "A state of mind." "A way of life." A major, driving, powerful culture in our midst is the culture of professionals. Football is its major public liturgy, its dramatic expression, its mirror-image festival.

In the daily world of politics, the word "professional" is used in fascinating ways. Of some lifelong politicians, an informed opinion of their performance is "hack" or "fake." By contrast, the most sober and comforting praise for a public figure or for this or that person on his staff is, "He's a real pro." An intermediate word of praise, spoken with a faintly baffled sort of affection, is the phrase, "an old pro." The meaning is that the person in question—Senator Sam Ervin, let us say—lacks some of the technical sophistication and scientific art of modern professionalism, but is, so to speak, an artist of an older style, in a different sort of way, and by God, admirable nevertheless. He "knows his way around," "knows what he's doing," and so one "shouldn't be fooled" by his apparent naïveté or folksy style. There are some jobs, among some constituencies, that maybe "the old pro" tackles with a surer grasp than "the real pro."

It's a very good feeling to be called by one's peers "a pro." Certification (college degrees, a tough job assignment) confers the objective status. But not all who have the certification are truly considered by their peers to be "the real pros."

Such hints suggest that an accurate discussion of culture must move on several levels.

The first meaning of culture applies to the "state of mind," or the "way of life," of our professional classes. This is the class that manages our institutions of certification—the schools, the universities, the media and the new institutes of research, development and consultantship. This same class also manages many of our traditional institutions—business corporations, government, foundations, churches and national organizations. By no means a majority of Americans experiences the culture of professionalization. But most of the high-salaried and/or organizing, articulating, managing and "influential" people do.

"Above" the level of the professional culture lies the "high culture" of family tradition, and/or money, and/or dedication to the classical, recognized arts. Nurture in a certain kind of family tradition—children of Cabots or Lodges, or of concert

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violinists or professors of the classics—sometimes provides the requisite sensibility. Money that can buy for a new generation the education denied its parents may provide it. (There are many "middlebrow" participants in high culture who enjoy its fruits without being creators.) Finally, sheer talent and desire, an "innate" capacity for the flowering of one's spirit, and the good fortune of schooling of some sort may provide it. Thus, not a few of our ablest artists and scholars today, like Abraham Lincoln and William Shakespeare, although not "wellborn," have advanced the reaches of the human spirit.

It is true that the "high culture," once it has been achieved, is in some respects more accessible to the wealthy than to the poor. The wealthy can travel. They have leisure. They are provided with instruction. They finance artists and scholars. They buy the materials, the time spent and the fruits of artistic endeavor; they are the patrons of art and learning. Yet by their nature the achievements of high culture speak to—and belong to—the human spirit, not to wealth. Instrumentally both a society and individuals require sufficient wealth to gain that freedom from necessity without which there are no liberal arts. Such wealth can be very modest. Even in the caves, humans began to draw, and already by the fireside the spirit of Lincoln was being forged. High culture, nonetheless, requires a culture in which leisure is available; it requires wealth. This instrumental tie between wealth and high culture occasions a certain embarrassment in a ruthlessly egalitarian society.

Common speech, we recall, distinguishes several kinds of professional performance. The main force of the word "professional" points toward a specialized commitment: one professes one line of work rather than another. A "hack" is a fellow who has not really mastered all the skills he needs, or else does not really commit the whole of himself to the skills he does possess. A "slick professional," or "operator," or *apparatchik* is a fellow who has the skills but no larger commitment to the whole reality of the world within which he operates; he is "a gun for hire." We respect his skills, but not the spirit of their use.

When we say "real pro," however, we mean that the person has not been distorted by his specialized techniques. We mean that his intelligence and instincts reach out for all the complex, ambiguous, even mysterious elements of the social realities within which he operates. We mean that, both regarding himself and regarding the world of his activities, he maintains a certain realism. He is "in touch." His professionalism is an instrument of his commitment to reality, not a defense against that reality. He is neither an operator, nor a hack, nor a mere specialist.

Hacks are easy to understand but what is the culture of the operator? We are afflicted with operators in America. As testimony to their "cultivation," they may take home-movies, or become amateur photographers, or be buffs of considerable artistic skill in one field or another. They may attend concerts or go to all the arty flicks. They may be articulate and even, in some sense, well and broadly educated. Yet there is a sense in which, used in this context, the word "culture" gives off a tinny ring. No doubt anthropologists should study their "culture," too; in a perfectly neutral sense, they represent a "state of mind," a "way of life," as surely as do primitive tribes in New Guinea. But in some way they are rootless, rudderless, without depth. They have made themselves rather into instruments than into ends. The phrase "new barbarians" points to their shallowness. It suggests that smooth, civil persons, persons of considerable education and articulateness, are somehow empty and lacking. Empty of what? Lacking what? No tradition, it seems, lives in them; no long-range, virtually unchangeable, perennial values guide them; their moral universe is without a center; no passionate inwardness directs them. They are, in a sense, larger than David Riesman intended, "other-directed." Success, power, expertise—their guides are extrinsic, changeable, consulted for the short term. The social realities of our "temporary society" do not discourage the flexibility such men exemplify. The state, as Plato

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says, is man writ large; so men are often their society writ small.

Operators, then, are quintessentially American; their role has been mythically established in *Huck Finn* and in Melville's *The Confidence Man.* They are outsiders, from the city (or the university), traveling salesmen, "experts." But what about the local cultures, those millions who admire and understand "the old pros" but dislike operators? When Senator Sam Ervin quotes the Bible and Shakespeare, he makes reverberate a network of trustworthy and illuminating traditions. He plays on symbolic strings that have shaped the consciousness of perhaps eighty million Americans. Many, indeed, find the language of a "country lawyer" a good deal more persuasive than the language of the new professionals. Many, indeed, can scarcely discriminate among the several languages of the new professionals. To them, they are all the same: the smooth articulateness of John Dean and Gary Hart, of David Brinkley and Professor Galbraith, of Doctor Kildare and Doctor Spock, of Jeb Stuart Magruder and William Coffin. Often today ideology does not divide people (liberal versus conservative) so much as cultural style does. The old pros remain connected to the symbolic worlds of this nation's many diverse cultures; the operators leave and "do not go home again."

Region, ethnicity, religion, race and other cultural factors shape symbolic consciousness in different ways. The Irish of Boston are not exactly like those of Minnesota or Texas; contrasts among John Kennedy, Eugene McCarthy, Joseph McCarthy, Richard Daley and John Connally suggest several of the most significant Irish traditions in the nation. Both George McGovern and George Wallace spring from fundamentalist Scotch-Irish traditions, but in regions whose history has been profoundly different. The symbolic worlds within which they speak set off intense but opposite vibrations.

Of the French-Canadians of New Hampshire and Maine; the Appalachians of West Virginia and Kentucky; the poor whites of Alabama and the Florida Panhandle; the Anglo-Americans of Wyoming and Idaho; the Oregonians; the Mormons of Utah; the Slavic farmers of Illinois and Nebraska, contrasted with the Slavic miners and millworkers of Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan; the Italians contrasted with the upper-class and the lower-class Jews of New York City; the Anglo-American Protestants who supported George Wallace in the 1968 Indiana primary in proportions far heavier than did German-American Protestants of similar economic class—of such diverse and crisscross variety is this nation composed.

Among blacks, there are differences depending on origins in Africa: on the generations of colonial experience whether in the West Indies, or rural Mississippi, or the cities of the South; and on length of time in the urban North. The Spanish-speaking populations of Miami, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Antonio and Albuquerque are significantly different. The experiences of Oriental Americans—including, without benefit of "Protestant ethic," their astonishing capacity for work and for success—are better admitted into consciousness if one approaches American pluralism from Hawaii and California, than from Boston and New York.

The variety of cultural worlds in the United States is a powerful, subterranean influence in our national life. It remains subterranean because it is often repressed, as though it were something "dirty," dysfunctional, and doomed to disappear. In its place, a "national" ideology has been created, divided into three parts. First, there is the ideology of "the American way of life," popular, patriotic, capitalistic, chauvinistic. Second, there is the ideology of the mobile, educated, "committed," professional classes—what one writer has called "the ideocracy." Third, there is the ideology of the neutral, meritocratic, uncommitted, objective professional classes, neither conservative nor liberal, but comfortably in charge. All three of these ideologies, for their own various purposes, try to eliminate cultural diversity. Each carries with it its own ethnic and regional biases. Some, for example, make provision for black, Hispanic and Indian diversity—and, pressed a little, perhaps, they might expand

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the list. But the terms of their analyses do not give cultural diversity the prominence reality demands.

It is true, we have seen, that there is a "common culture" in the West, a set of achievements that represents the most profound insights, wrested from suffering, that Western peoples for some five millennia have attained. But it is not true that even highly educated people in any part of the West are well versed in all the subtraditions of this "common culture." A young Italian from New Jersey who attends the University of Notre Dame will have as part of the furniture of his mind and sensibility materials that the young Jew from Brooklyn who attends City College of New York will not share, and vice versa. When I compare, for example, my years of reading in St. Augustine, St. Bernard, Thomas Aquinas, Cardinal Newman and others, my virtual neglect of Marx, and my dislike of Enlightenment writers like Kant and Mill, with the reading patterns exhibited by, say, Irving Howe, it is vividly clear to me that American intellectual life is profoundly diverse. So it is also with Protestant colleagues of mine in philosophy and religious studies who respond in significantly different ways to materials we jointly consider. Other colleagues have interests and training in the sciences or social sciences; their symbolic world is, again, quite different from mine.

"Where did you grow up? Where did you go to school? What is your religious and ethnic background? What do these mean to you?" These are important questions, not for purposes of stereotyping, but for intelligent and sensitive perception. In order to come to learn and to appreciate the cultural background within which the words of others gain their full and familiar meaning, we must be able to answer such questions. What we have most to gain from each other is generated by our mutual differences. The different horizon, standpoint and way of perceiving we each bring to our common world are instruments of spiritual wealth.

Consider the following propositions:

1. There is a common Western culture of high intellectual and humanizing potency, instructing all who journey into it in inexhaustible wisdom, insight and spiritual depth.
2. This common culture is composed of many related but divergent traditions, and no one can master all of them.
3. Beyond the boundaries of Western culture, there are also other "common cultures" of great complexity and diversity. In some of these non-Western riches, westerners are also beginning to share, in ways both superficial and serious.
4. In higher education and in museums and other instrumentalities of culture in the United States, Protestant traditions within the common culture have been favored over Catholic and Jewish traditions. English literature and philosophy have been favored over Continental literatures and philosophies. Post-Enlightenment materials have virtually driven pre-Enlightenment materials from the field. Agnostic or atheistic materials are favored over religious materials. A rather positivistic ideology of the modern, the progressive and the "factual" has dominated our dictionaries and encyclopedias, as well as our schools, our journalism and our business world. (Dictionaries do not list under "rose" one of its most important cultural meanings: that it is the flower of love, fate and war.)
5. Education is commonly regarded, not as a device for strengthening and benefiting by local, regional, ethnic and religious differences but for "overcoming" them, for replacing them with a more or less universal culture. The underlying model for this "universal" ideological outlook is not perfectly neutral as regards those who enter into it. Even if they are of equal talent, some will find cultural models, heroes, texts and materials related to their own cultural background, and others will not.
6. The preferred and most prestigious model for the "high culture" in the United States coincides with the background of our most wealthy and powerful citizens. This model illustrates the history of some, at least, of our major institutions, and partially grounds the dominant language of the land. Hence

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even though it is biased, it cannot be ignored.

Let us attend, first, to proposition 6. Andover, Groton, Milton, Choate and the other prestigious private schools nurture a good part of one major wing of the nation's financial and governmental elites. Yet with every year that passes, in order to understand American reality, students have to go further beyond the limits of Anglo-American traditions. How can one understand Mailer, Malamud, Trilling, Chomsky or Howe without understanding the Jewish traditions of Eastern Europe and America? How can one understand Kennedy, McCarthy or Daley without learning about the Irish experience in America? Will anyone comprehend Detroit without learning about black history in America and Polish history in America—two out of every three citizens of that city being either black or Polish, while virtually all the wealth and power of the city's elites remain Anglo-American and Jewish?

Power in America is essentially Anglo-American, hence it is a condition of survival (and of eventual justice) that all the others penetrate the intricacies of the Anglo-American mind. The Yankee pride in "candor," for example, has generated unique deceptions, especially self-deceptions, whose routes must be painfully traced and plainly marked. Yankee appeals to "morality" and "leadership" and "integrity" require most careful scrutiny; these are the banners of the most powerful elites. Thus those whose heritage is not Anglo-American have every right (and duty) both to assimilate all that is good in Anglo-American culture, and to be clear-eyed about what assimilation entails.

Two years ago, Irving Howe quoted in these pages the argument of Louis Kampf that "initiating the 'underprivileged' to the cultural treasures of the West could be a form of oppression—a weapon in the hands of those who rule. . . . High culture itself . . . tends to reinforce the given alignments of power within the society." Against Kampf, Howe is able to quote Trotsky: "Mastery of the art of the past is . . . a necessary precondition not only for the creation of new art but also for the building of a new society. . . . If we were groundlessly to repudiate the art of the past, we should at once become poorer spiritually." Cultural backwardness is not required for political advance.

And yet, what is meant by "backwardness"? In order to be a fully moral man must one be a professor, or at minimum a college graduate? Is it necessary to have read many books? "Man is not saved by dialectics," a Christian aphorism insists. The simple, too, have their own precious wisdom and the learned their patent foolishness. It is not necessary to romanticize either side in order to recognize that there are analogies between the life stories of the uneducated and those of the college trained.

A democracy needs an early discernment system, to spot young persons of talent in every social condition. But it also needs a way to encourage young persons of talent to remain (if they so wish) in living contact with their own roots. They should be encouraged not to be parochial, and yet to be rooted. Neither our egalitarians nor our meritocrats, it seems, have a sufficiently cultural perspective; both proceed somewhat atomically, somewhat mechanically.

According to egalitarian sentimentality, any student admitted to college through "open admissions" has within him the makings of a student. According to meritocratic arrogance, each student should be judged according to his own performance. The egalitarian forgets that a university is an institution not all citizens are graced with the talent to appreciate; perhaps not one person in ten ought to be admitted to a genuine university. The meritocrat forgets that persons are not individuals merely but also creatures of culture, and that the institutions of high culture in the United States are inequitably and inhumanely ethnocentric.

When as a young Slovak-American I read (with eagerness and delight) "English literature," I learned as well a latent message: "*These* are the kinds of people literature is about; not about families like yours, feelings like yours, dilemmas like yours." Literature was not (except by analogy) about myself; it was about those fascinat-

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ing, foreign "others." In our part of town, when I was very young, we called them "the Americans." (With less than accurate perception, we included the Irish among "the Americans." We seldom dealt directly with Anglo-Americans.)

The heart of the matter comes down to this. There are three main locations of culture. The actual ways of life of ordinary people, in their diverse, loose and permeable communities are one location. The humanities are, in this sense, not primarily what is written down in books, or celebrated in works of art, but what is lived. Those relatively few artists, scholars and critical persons in whom a genuinely high culture is alive are a second location. The swarming army of professionals, highly educated but not necessarily in tune with the high traditions of the past, are a third location. Among these new professionals are many who call themselves humanists. Each of these groups is to be taken seriously. Each enhances our own identity.

We need, in America, a public and popular humanities—a pluralism of stories, myths, accurate histories, detailed studies that touch our various people in all their variety. As a boy, I wish I had learned of the exploits of Janošik as well as of Robin Hood, and had been taught in public and parochial school of the democratic traditions of the early Slovak tribes. I wish I had learned that, after the origins of feudalism, my ancestors endured a thousand-year struggle against oppression that is not yet complete. I wish I had learned officially and fully of the bitter deaths of so many of my countrymen in the mills and mines and strikes of Pennsylvania. (The murder of the Jablonskis of the United Mine Workers is a recent episode in a hundred-year war.) My sense of injustice and untruth in America would have come earlier than it did. I would have learned earlier both a tragic sense of life and a fierce desire to remedy injustice. I would have had a way to discern what made me culturally different, and what my peculiar contribution might have been. I would have had personal parallels by which to judge more accurately what America had done to the Indians, blacks and others in America. (What was *I* doing, cheering for Custer in *They Died with Their Boots On?*)

We also need, of course, a high culture. We need continuity with the visions and sources of judgment upon us that derive from the great spiritual achievements of our past. In many American towns, counties and cities, one family or a small number of families controls the politics, economics and media of communication. Against their vulgar power, the arts and critical skills of the high culture are as powerful a threat as human beings have. Indeed even our highest national elites, our best and our brightest, suffer embarrassment compared to the best our race has seen before. I recognize that our elites sometimes use "taste" and "culture" as weapons of intimidation, which only proves their own vulgarity. The proof that a person has attained a genuine high culture is his unselfconscious respect for the moral analogies between his life and those of others. Portrayed in myth and narrative as the nobleman at home with peasants, the saint with sinners, the learned doctor with children and the ignorant, the political leader sharing his people's crusts of bread, this is the excellence by which our culture measures us. It is not exactly an egalitarian standard, for differences of station and talent are not blurred; but it is, at least, a standard of fraternity, and of the human spirit's radical equality in the eyes of God.

Finally, we need the professionals. It is true that concerning the large and important issues, they are almost always wrong. But this is exactly what we should expect; it is their profession to attend scrupulously to a part of the whole; they almost necessarily distort. Yet specialization is no cause for excommunication. Professionals are our brothers, too. We need their powerful skills. One could wish that more of them would turn their skills toward many neglected problems. To mention but one: toward the history and culture of each of the diverse peoples of the United States. Toward an accurate history of our actual pluralism.

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On Guilt, Relativism and Black-White Relations

ORLANDO PATTERSON

No group of people can live in a moral vacuum. Whether we know it or not, our behavior, both within our own group and between ourselves and members of other groups, is always guided by a set of values, prejudices and sentiments. Where relations are well developed, there is often little need to explicate in precise terms the moral basis of our actions, since these unstated values are acquired during the course of our upbringing and become almost second nature. Every genuine community has what may be called its own unwritten moral constitution, which is all the more effective because it remains unwritten.

There are two situations, however, where such a moral constitution does not exist (or only barely exists), where the relations between men are, at best, guided by grudgingly obeyed laws or, in the worst instance, by a selfish, Hobbesian fear of chaos and disorder. One situation concerns the relations between groups, and occurs when, for whatever reason, two or more groups of people come together, or are forced together, and must evolve some formula that will ensure their mutual interests or survival. The second situation concerns the relations among members of a single group of people who have yet to develop those learned sinews of social cohesion that underlie a lasting sense of group identification, consciousness and dignity. In more sociological terms, the group exists, but is more the product of external than internal forces, and has a weak institutional base.

The black American is in the unenviable position of confronting not one, but both of these sets of problems. He must develop the cultural underpinnings, the moral constitution that other ethnic groups are fortunate enough to have inherited from their migrant ancestors who, if they brought nothing else across the Atlantic with them, transported some kind of invisible cultural baggage. Much of this invisible baggage had, of course, to be discarded or reshaped and pooled into the fascinating cultural ragbag that became America. But the very fact that they had much to discard and to offer reinforced, rather than detracted from, the new sense of ethnic identity that they evolved.

There was little place on the vessels of the middle passage even for invisible cargoes. Some vestigial memories perhaps—the primeval myth of the blood-tie; fragments of the ritual and fear of death; the peculiar status and power of womanhood; indestructible cadences of laughter, sounds and movements—these, and a few more. But they were not enough to bring the wretched bodies that ploughed the fields of Southern horror together. So that what the black American now attempts is the staggering task of filling the near void of his New World history. It is an epic sort of undertaking, quite unique in the annals of mankind. A task replete with anguish and with the most brutal ironies.

The internal task of creating a viable moral order poses certain special ethical problems that I have discussed at some

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length elsewhere. (See my article, "The Moral Crisis of the Black American" in the Summer, 1973 issue of the *Public Interest*.) There it was argued that black Americans should adopt a strongly self-determinist position in their attempt to shape their world and, conversely, that determinism, in spite of its superficial attractions, should be rejected at all costs.

But it is to the first of the two problems mentioned earlier that I wish to address myself in what follows. While the black American is wholly responsible for creating his own internal moral constitution, he is only partly responsible for the resolution of his other major problem—that of creating a viable moral community on the national level, in which he meets other Americans in equal moral terms, and in which he shares equally the obligations and rewards of a great industrial society.

As a start in this direction, one must recognize what is most central in the present relations between blacks and whites: the fact that one group dominates the other. As such, it is important to distinguish the special kinds of responsibility and blame each shares in relation to the other. In doing so, I shall use the typology of guilt and responsibility offered by Karl Jaspers in his classic statement, *The Question of German Guilt,* as a framework within which to couch my own argument.

Jaspers distinguished among four types of guilt (and, by implication, of responsibility): criminal guilt, political guilt, moral guilt and metaphysical guilt. I shall refer only to the first three types since I am not entirely persuaded by the idea of metaphysical guilt.

Criminal guilt refers to criminal acts, those that break clearly specified laws and are punishable through the courts. Only individuals are guilty of criminal acts. Thus, the white race is no more guilty of the lynching of blacks than the black race is criminally responsible for the homicidal acts of its criminals. There is a perverse tendency in American society, especially among liberal commentators and journalists, to transform responsibility for individual acts of criminality into collective guilt. Never is this more pronounced than after an assassination or mass killing by some criminal maniac. There is, of course, a sense in which we are responsible for the actions of others, as I shall indicate shortly, but we are in no way responsible for the base criminality and depravity of others. Criminal guilt is a completely individual affair. A nation cannot be held responsible for the private acts of its criminals, any more than a race or a class can. Of course, where a group of people collectively engages in or actively condones acts of criminality, they become criminally liable, at least as accomplices. The case reported in the *New York Times* of a group of construction workers looking on passively while a man raped a woman in broad daylight under their noses is a clear example of collective criminal responsibility. Similarly, Germans who knew about the concentration camps of World War II and either actively or passively condoned them, like the members of Southern communities who knew about and condoned lynchings, were all criminally responsible. At the same time, one cannot condemn all New Yorkers for the rape mentioned above any more than one can condemn all Southerners for lynchings that they knew nothing about. And it is morally spurious, to say the least, to consider the descendants of such groups criminally responsible for past atrocities.

The situation is quite different with political guilt and responsibility. "This," writes Jaspers, "involving the deeds of statesmen and the citizenry of a state, results in my having to bear the consequences of the deeds of the state whose power governs me and under whose order I live." I must qualify this definition of political guilt in two ways. First, it seems fair that only citizens who meaningfully participate in the election of their government can be held politically responsible for that government. And second, elected officers are clearly more liable than electors. With these two qualifications in mind, we consider it right to cast political blame and responsibility on groups of people, especially elected officeholders. Thus, there can

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be no doubt that the white upper and middle classes, as well as the black middle class, are liable for political blame with respect to the poverty and exploitation of the black and white lower classes in the United States.

The elected leaders of American society, in passing or in failing to pass laws that fully ensure the rights of black Americans, in allowing other groups to compete with them at an unfair advantage, in allowing racist leaders to wield malicious power in delaying measures that are in the group's interests, and in exploiting racial and ethnic fears for political ends, are all politically guilty.

And let me add here that it is extremely dishonest to confuse moral responsibility with political liability. I am strongly in favor of moral self-determination as the ethical basis for all *individual* behavior and interaction. This holds only for interactions involving politicians in their private lives, however, acting as individuals in face-to-face contact with other individuals.

The statesman, qua statesman, bears an entirely different relationship with his electors from that existing between private individuals. First, he is the holder of an exalted office, and his job is to execute the role of leader for the common good, not just the good of a narrowly conceived plurality. Second, as statesman, he has been given unusual power, and this alters the nature of his relationship with individual members of the state. Third, the statesman relates not primarily to individuals but to groups, classes and interests. Finally, the statesman rules. That is to say, he determines the course of events and the lives of his electors in one way or another.

Now it is absolutely spurious for a statesman to claim that he is not interested in actively determining the forces that shape his nation, by using the powers of the state at his disposal, on the grounds that he is a self-determinist and that individuals must be left to determine their own destiny. Not to rule actively is itself a form of ruling; not to determine a policy of change is to determine a special kind of policy, namely, the perpetuation of the *status quo*. And if the *status quo* is such that a substantial number of people—between a fifth and a third of the entire nation—are condemned to the indignities and degradation of poverty in the midst of affluence which, in turn, makes the realization of self-determinism, which we advocate, impossible, then it follows that self-determinism, so conceived on the part of a statesman, is utterly contradictory.

An activist statesman who seeks to change his society is behaving in the best tradition of self-determination if we regard the statesman, as we should, as the embodiment of the will of the state. The statesman wills, through his policies, the course of development of the state for the common good, it is to be hoped, and, through the powers vested in him, and through skill, craft and cunning, he realizes that which he wills. In this way he rules a state that can proudly claim that it determines its own destiny rather than one that has its destiny blindly determined by economic and social forces.

Here, however, we come upon one of the most basic contradictions in the underlying philosophy of *laissez faire* capitalism, a contradiction that remains unresolved because it is in the best interest of the established classes not to resolve it. The contradiction is that in supporting self-determinism on the individual level (for some people), *laissez faire* capitalism requires, on the state level, a surrender to determinism, to the unchecked and unwilled forces of an imperfect market and distributive system. And as we indicated above, the conservative self-determinist statesman disguises this contradiction by deliberately confusing collective political liability with individual morality; in other words, by pretending that there is no difference between the moral requirements of his role as private individual relating to other private individuals, and his role as statesman ruling the citizens of a state.

I have discussed the issue of political responsibility at some length, not only because it is generally important, but also because of its relevance to the present

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political scene in America. The leaders of the present government have repeatedly attempted to justify the abandonment of policies aimed at helping the poor and disadvantaged on the grounds that the freedom and self-determination of individuals must not be interfered with by the state. Their position is unacceptable, particularly to a true and humane self-determinist.

But it is not only politicians who are liable for the wrongs of the state. All those who participate in the political process and gain from it must consider themselves responsible. And this includes blacks. This, however, is not an excuse for political separatism. One cannot, as a black citizen, evade the issue of political responsibility by simply refusing to participate in the system. Rather, one accepts one's complicity as a necessary evil and then actively atones by working to rid the system of its evils.

Moral guilt and responsibility, unlike political responsibility, are entirely matters of individual conscience. Elsewhere, we have examined the moral dilemma of blacks regarding their own condition as an exploited group. But what of the white American? What should his moral stand be in relation to the condition of black Americans? *The simple answer is that his conception of, and relationship with, blacks should be guided by exactly the same moral principles as those that guide his action and attitudes toward his white peers.* Anything else, as I hope to show, spells moral and interracial disaster.

A white person is clearly entitled to feelings of sympathy for those of his fellowmen, *all* of his fellowmen, including blacks, who suffer and are exploited. But sympathy and compassion should not be confused with pity and patronage; nor should they be taken to imply determinism or double standards.

Unfortunately, many whites draw precisely this perverse moral implication. This is done in one of two ways. One involves a well-meaning but mistaken commitment to the relativistic dogma. The other involves a malignant indulgence of the sense of guilt. I want to suggest that these two types of responses lie at the heart of much of the anguish, tension and tragic misunderstandings that presently beset black-white relations.

Before examining the specific operation of the relativistic dogma in American race relations, I want to explore its major weaknesses as a basis for intergroup relations on a more general level. Relativism was developed by modern social science, especially anthropology, as an academic and moral strategy in the study of alien peoples. It asserts that each culture, or subculture, must be treated on its own terms because of the basic premise that the values, attitudes and prejudices of each group are determined by that group's own peculiar form of conditioning. Human values, in short, have no absolutes, and those belonging to one group can be taken as no better or worse than those of another.

Now if the values of all men are the products and specific attributes of their own groups, and if anthropologists and other relativists are men—as none of them, to the best of my knowledge, has ever denied—then anthropologists and other relativists hold values that are the products and specific attributes of their own group. And since relativism is one of the values held by that group of men who claim to be relativists (there being no absolutes in human values), then relativism is itself the product of a particular group. Thus, relativism turns out to be hopelessly self-contradictory since it asserts the need to view all peoples and their values in their own terms, but in the very act of doing so, it asserts the need to see other peoples and their values in terms of a specific culture, that of the relativists.

In more precise logical terms, relativism is self-contradictory both in a general categorical sense and in a substantive, specific way. It postulates, on the most general level, a basic negative statement (there is no universal value) that is the implication of its own contradiction (there is at least one universal value, relativism). In more specific, substantive terms, it is also self-contradictory, since it asserts a general value (the values of all peoples are of equal

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worth), then contradicts it by implying the superiority of the values of the group consisting of relativists (it is good to see other peoples in their own terms), a value clearly not shared by most other peoples, as the researches of the anthropologists themselves have demonstrated.

In an effort to salvage something from the relativistic dogma, a few of its advocates, while conceding its logical contradictions, have argued that, as an ideal, it is worth pursuing, since it encourages a liberal sense of tolerance toward other peoples. But even on this purely ideological level, relativism turns out to be a risky business. True enough, it is often associated with a liberal and tolerant attitude. But it is doubtful whether the association is in any way causal. Tolerance does not require relativism. A deep sense of commitment to one's own values in no way implies a distaste or hatred for other peoples' values. On the contrary, such a commitment may well be a prerequisite for a sincere respect for other men's views. Those who respect themselves most are best able to appreciate the worth of others; those who are most weak and insecure must compensate either by hating others who do not share the ideals they themselves have failed to achieve, or by forcing themselves to be good by clinging to false doctrines.

Relativism, in fact, can be associated just as easily with a reactionary view of the world, and can easily be used to rationalize inaction, complacency and even the vilest forms of oppression. It is all too easy for the reactionary white South African, or American, to say of the reservation Bantus or Indians, that it is wrong to interfere with their way of life since what might appear to be squalor and backwardness to us, may be matters of great virtue to them. Apartheid intellectuals, it should not be forgotten, quite self-consciously rationalize their perverse racial doctrine by appealing to the relativistic dogma. And what is most unnerving is that they do so without the slightest trace of cynicism, a point that Isaac Schapera, the distinguished South African anthropologist, often made in his conversations with me.

Much the same attitude is often encountered, although in less explicitly racist forms, in traditional attitudes toward Indian Americans, sometimes called "native Americans" with an irony that is neither deliberate nor subtle. Only recently have American anthropologists grown sensitive to the serpent curled up in the hollow center of the dogma that they have cherished for so long. Thus, in 1964, Fred Eggan, that most classical of anthropologists, observed in his lecture, "Lewis H. Morgan and the Future of the American Indian": "As the Indian begins to understand *us,* he is shifting from a passive accommodation to our desires to an active concern for his own future. The events over which we feel the greatest guilt are the ones from which the Indian draws his greatest strength."

We have said enough to indicate the pitfalls that await any attempt by ordinary men and women to employ this approach in their relations with other members of their own society belonging to different subgroups. Yet, tragically, the relativistic creed is fast taking root among most well-meaning Americans in their efforts to establish a moral basis for interaction in their multiethnic society. Indeed it has almost acquired an official status under the more familiar banner of pluralism.

The American increasingly uses one of two strategies in his relations with others. One strategy is summed up by the dictum: "Do unto others (belonging to a different ethnic group) as you imagine they would do unto themselves." The other is expressed in the more familiar dictum: "Do unto others as you would wish they would do unto you."

Now one barely scratches the surface of the first of these strategies before one encounters some serious problems. For one thing, if there are so few shared values between you and the members of another group that you have to relate to them relativistically, it is hardly likely that what you imagine to be their way of doing unto themselves is going to be right. Only professional anthropologists can pretend to such knowledge and even they, as we have seen, have trouble operating with it. In

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no other area of human relations is the old adage, that a little knowledge is dangerous, more relevant than in black-white relations.

Another problem with relativism is that it is nonreciprocal and, as such, easily degenerates into unintended patronage. It is one thing for the white pluralist to attempt to relate relativistically to blacks; how blacks respond to this attempt is quite another matter. And as often as not, blacks are not interested in a relative response. In so far as they become morally involved with whites at all, their main concern is either to judge the white person in much the same way that others are judged, or to judge in the manner that best insures condemnation. The benign relativist, then, is trapped in a patronizing situation, in spite of all his good intentions, for he is implying cultural and moral differences where the other party is refusing to accept the existence of such differences. To his astonishment he will have found that he has exposed himself to the charges of double standards, or moral superiority, or both.

Relativism, however contradictory, at least has the merit of good intentions. No such claim can be made for the perverse show of guilt that all too frequently is used as an excuse for moral concern. Guilt is an essential feature of man's moral being. And when it induces a sense of responsibility it is clearly an ennobling quality. It can, however, easily descend into a squalid form of emotional exhibitionism and gross insincerity. It is this kind of guilt that typifies the behavior of many whites in their relations with blacks.

In black-white relations it takes three particularly odious forms. First, we find it operating in the tendency of certain whites to parade their own cheap virtue by castigating all other whites who dare to remain true to their own moral principles in their relations with blacks, or their attempts to understand the black experience. Certain liberals, for example, have made a profession of embarrassing fellow whites who study the problems of black people by "proving" that their best efforts have been motivated by the worst forms of self-interest or hidden racism.

Another form of malignant guilt is found in the tendency toward what Jaspers called "the urge to confess." On this he wrote:

> Oddly, sensitivity to blame is very apt to rebound into an urge to confess. Such confessions of guilt—false, because still instinctive and lustful—have one unmistakable external trait: fed by the same will to power as their opposites in the same individual, they betray the confessor's wish to enhance his worth by his confession, to eclipse others. His confession of guilt wants to force others to confess. There is a touch of aggressiveness in such confessions. Moralism as a phenomenon of the will to power fosters both sensitivity to blame and confessions of guilt, both reproach and self-reproach, and psychologically it causes each of these to rebound into the other.

There can be few Americans who have not witnessed this urge to confess and its dismal consequences. Blacks, naturally, resent it because it is not hard to see—through the thin veil of obsequiousness—the rearing, ugly head of aggression and the will to power. Unfortunately, many blacks find themselves unable to resist the temptation to respond pathologically to this urge to confess, the result being a vicious little game of dishonesty which is quite unique to American race relations. I shall return to it shortly.

The third, and perhaps the worst form of malignant guilt, occurs when guilt is merely a disguise for barely suppressed contempt and pity and, as often as not, disgust and fear. On one level, there is merely a fashionable play at guilt. Often, however, on another level, there is a real sense of guilt, but this is derived mainly from one's lack of genuine guilt and an intimation of the real, unfelt concern that one's pretended guilt has merely violated. And, of course, at this point it is all too easy to compound one's immorality by moving to a second level of pretense in which one conveniently allows oneself to believe that the guilt one feels about one's lack of genuine guilt is the only level of guilt that one is actually experiencing.

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There is another way in which the display of guilt by whites, whether real or pretended, demeans the relation between a black and a white person. This derives from the nature of guilt and its relationship with the closely related emotion of shame. Traditionally, guilt has been taken to mean self-reproach or the emotional and moral response to a sense of having broken certain deeply held, internalized ideals and values, in contrast with shame, which has been viewed as a response to external stimuli, that is, a sense of worthlessness, inferiority or ridicule in the eyes of others. But as Helen Lynd has pointed out, the distinction is more complex than this. Shame and guilt, while not antithetical, involve different emphases on the same underlying complex of emotional and moral experiences. Shame involves a loss of honor and self-respect; it is, in Helen Lynd's words, "both the wounding of one's own self-ideal and disgrace in the eyes of others," whereas guilt is associated with "a failure to pay a debt—violation of a prohibition, or—transgression of a boundary," a sense of wrongdoing. Seen in this way, shame is a more deeply emotional experience than guilt, and a more complex one, subtly revealed, for example, in the radically different meanings of the terms "guiltless" and "shameless."

Now what we find in the pathological black-white relationships based on malignant guilt is a curious polarization of guilt and shame, and the specialized enactment of each by each party, resulting in the escalating game of dishonesty and emotional violence mentioned earlier. The interacting cycle develops along the lines: white guilt—black shame—more white guilt—et cetera.

It is easy to see how this happens. The white person affects or experiences guilt as his clumsy attempt to resolve his moral unease in his relations with a black person. The guilt is resented by the black person (and the only difference that pretense, on the part of the white person, makes in this case is that it compounds the resentment), partly because it reminds him of the indignity that occasioned it, partly because it is viewed as a dishonest response, but mainly because it implies superiority on the part of the white person. Guilt, one should not forget, is the privilege of the oppressor. The black person feels shame because he is reminded that he is the wronged, the injured and the oppressed. The confession of the oppressor (or, more accurately, the person perversely assuming the role of oppressor) in no way diminishes his sense of inferiority. It merely inflames him. It is salt in the wounds of his shame, salt that had been offered as the oil of atonement. In the anger and hate that ensues, there is the need to injure the injurer, to change places with him, to gain, pathetically, the envied privilege of experiencing guilt, and objectifying another person—none other than the oppressor—with it. It is a vain effort, of course, the fey wish of the loser, but enough to escalate the self-reproachment of the "guilty" party. So the sordid game propels itself.

It should hardly be necessary to point out that my criticism of relativism should in no way be taken to imply a defense of ethnocentrism. On the contrary, it should be clear by now that it is relativism that secretly celebrates tribal identities and chauvinism. It is not by chance that the emergence of the idea of pluralism has been accompanied by a resurgence of the grossest forms of ethnic vulgarities. No nation can be sustained by a culture that is simply a grotesque potpourri of the patterns of every imaginable tribal group, all jostling with one another for a place on the national table for their own cherished recipe.

Pluralism is an absurdity and a mockery of a great industrial society. For the poor and victimized it is a cruel hoax, since it exploits all the reactionary potential of relativism mentioned earlier. Thus, it lifts the burden of emphasis on their economic condition and places it, instead, on easily conceded cultural claims. At the same time, by legitimizing atavistic sentiments, it awakens and lends respectability to that most primordial of group identities—race. It is a short step from the glorification of ethnic peculiarities to that of racial pecu-

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liarities. And when several ethnic groups can be united on the basis of a more inclusive racial category and played off against one or more smaller, expendable groups, pluralism becomes an irresistible weapon for the ruthless, who see in it a chance to build new "majorities" of the middle and the petty that are anything but silent in their prejudices and viciousness toward the unincluded.

Worst of all, pluralism works actively against the emergence of that moral constitution that American society now so badly needs to support the high ideals of its legal constitution. The only alternative is a return to the idea of cosmopolitanism. I say return, because Americans did evolve a cosmopolitan ideal that was expressed in the homely but noble concept of the melting pot, a concept that has been one of the major casualties of the upsurge of pluralism.

To understand the strange demise of the cosmopolitan ideal in America one must distinguish among three concepts: the idea of the melting pot, which is, simply, the cosmopolitan ideal; the myth of the melting pot, which is the social fiction that the ideal had been realized when, in fact, the reality was still a far cry from it; and the reality of the melting pot, which is the actual extent to which the melting-pot ideal had been realized, independent of exaggerations and myths about it.

Starting with the last, there can be no doubt that slowly, but steadily, the better side of America showed itself to be an emerging cosmopolitan culture, one that was the unique product of a modern industrial civilization. It is the peculiar genius of the founding intellectuals of the American republic that, whatever their personal failings, they recognized and anticipated the essential ingredients of that social philosophy that were most congruent with a modern industrial culture, and at a time when the reality of American society would hardly have made them obvious. Half the nation still rested on a system of slavery; the traumas of civil war and reconstruction were yet to be experienced; and the cataclysmic impact of the mass migration of European peasants could not have been anticipated.

In spite of all these developments, the slow, often checkered, cultural trend line of America, until the late fifties, was toward the fulfillment of those cosmopolitan ideals that would lend moral support to, and become, in Bagehot's phrase, the "efficient secret" behind the legal constitution. As to be expected, it was first in the arts, especially in literature, music (jazz, mainly) and, more recently, painting, that the cosmopolitan ideal was realized. So that in spite of grave misgivings about the seamier and grosser sides of American life, the society was able to attract in great numbers some of the finest minds of other nations, men and women, artists and scientists, who were drawn to its cosmopolitan urban centers by the same magnetic social force that, two thousand years ago, drew the literati of other advanced cultures, as well as the barbarian fringe, to Rome. What is more, the cosmopolitan ideal was also, although to a much smaller degree, taking form among the common people through their moral commitment to, if not enthusiasm for, the melting-pot creed. By the late fifties ethnicity was, if not a dirty word, something to be shunned publicly by all except politicians (who were expected to be gross), a minor national vice to be indulged behind ghetto walls and discreetly defined neighborhoods.

All this was to change suddenly under the combined impact of four separate forces that converged in the early sixties. One was the black struggle for equality; the second was the phenomenal growth of prosperity among the white working classes during the fifties; the third was the explosion of the mass media during the fifties, resulting in the total conquest of the minds of the masses by television; and the fourth was the emergence of the myth of identity.

It was perhaps inevitable that the long overdue struggle of the blacks for equality in their society should have emphasized race and ethnicity as the bases for group solidarity and progress. Beyond a certain point, however, this emphasis became counterproductive, in that the acceptance of the

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rights of blacks to assert their own cultural and economic claims in purely racial terms intensified and relegitimized the politics of ethnicity. It is most significant that two of the major leaders of the black revolution —Martin Luther King and Malcolm X— recognized, toward the end of their lives, the dangers of basing a revolution in America on purely racial terms, and were rapidly moving toward a restatement of their demands in more general terms that emphasized class oppression and structural inequalities. It is perhaps significant, although only symbolically, that they were both assassinated at precisely this turning point in their ideological development.

The late fifties and early sixties also ushered in an era of unprecedented prosperity for the white working classes in America. It is a well-established fact that no group of people is more insecure and potentially reactionary than a working class that has just acquired new economic gains. Coming at this time, black demands were bound to be seen as a threat to the newly won and precariously held prosperity of the working class. The mood of the white working classes was therefore easy prey for the old-style ethnic demagogues who saw a new opportunity not just to intensify the ethnic political style of the early twentieth century, but, precisely because the black struggle was being waged and responded to on the national level, to extend ethnic politics from its municipal backyard to the national arena.

The glaring tones and colors of ethnic dialogue are ideally suited to the mass media. Nothing is more exciting to the cynical marketeers who peep at the world from behind TV cameras than a clash of ethnic groups or a parade of ethnic identity. The media not only reflected but were largely responsible for developing "the ethnic thing"; and by the late sixties the ethnic style was very much in, not only in areas of politics, but in the popular arts, fashion, literature and even a few corners of the serious art world.

Added to all this was the emergence of what Bennett M. Berger, with much "fear and trembling," calls the "identity myth." Berger concentrates on the psychological origins of the identity myth and interprets it as the moral pressure that modern society places on the adolescent and young adult to answer the question, "Who am I?" "because we (psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists—and the media that mold what Philip Rieff has called 'psychological man') have taught the educated young to conceptualize as an 'identity problem' their quite understandable anxieties about an uncertain future." Berger is correct as far as he goes, but he fails to notice that the identity myth has a wider and deeper source, one that makes it applicable not just to the young in their transition from adolescence to adulthood, but to all age groups. This is the more philosophically inspired revolution in popular thinking that has led men to believe that life is nothing if it is not meaningful (the question then is not just "Who am I?" but "Why am I?"), an essentially spurious notion, the absurdity of which even the genius of Albert Camus could not explode. Like the question "Who am I?" the question "Why am I?" (or, "Does my life have a meaning?") has been asked by man from the moment he had sense enough to reflect on his existence. But it has been only recently that an answer to such questions has been felt to be a matter of compelling significance, or, indeed, that any such answer is either possible or necessary.

Where, formerly, the identity myth was the preserve of a privileged few, due to the enormous expense of psychoanalytic therapy, the late sixties witnessed a shift toward new forms of group therapy such as the encounter and T-group movements. The cheapest form of group therapy, however, is always a nativistic revival of primordial solidarities. And since ethnicity had been already revived, and was very much in the air, it was inevitable that the identity movement would converge with ethnicity, the latter becoming the new escape into community and empathy from the presumed terrors of modern urban society.

The convergence of these four sets of forces, then, dealt a serious blow to the

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still fragile and emerging realization of the cosmopolitan ideal that now, if not quite dead, lies terribly shattered and abandoned by those who should be its strongest supporters.

But this is not all. During the sixties, social scientists and purveyors of the higher journalism, made sensitive to the issue by the revival of ethnic loyalties, began to debunk the myth that had exaggerated the extent to which the ideal of the melting pot had been realized. Glazer and Moynihan's brilliant study of ethnicity and politics in New York was perhaps the most sophisticated treatise in this direction. It is important to note, however, that these authors were primarily concerned with the myth and the reality of the melting pot. Their work was in no way prescriptive, and they carefully avoided any statement on the validity of the ideal itself.

Few other commentators, however, were that careful. Debunking the melting-pot myth became the favorite pastime of liberal intellectuals, who got in on the act for a variety of reasons: some to ingratiate themselves with black intellectuals; others to ingratiate themselves with their own, formerly spurned, parochial thinkers; and others because they genuinely felt that they had found in pluralism the new intellectual panacea. But in debunking the myth that the cosmopolitan ideal of the melting pot had been achieved, a subtle and sinister shift in emphasis soon came about. From a denial of the claim that the melting-pot ideal had worked, there was a shift to the denial of the melting-pot ideal itself. Today one defends this ideal, which, remember, is nothing less than the American version of the cosmopolitan ethic, with "fear and trembling."

I consider this to be one of the most (if not the most) tragic intellectual developments of the sixties and early seventies. For it has played right into the hands of the most reactionary and vicious elements of American society. These elements, who had paid their respects to the cosmopolitan ideal in the past, simply because it was so uniquely and traditionally American, but who had always been uncomfortable with it, quickly seized the initiative to fill the moral void created by its demise, by adopting, as their very own, the particularistic and divisive social philosophy of pluralism. In this they were, and still are, blindly supported by liberal intellectuals who have given the pernicious doctrine not only a catchy, innocent name, but also a semblance of intellectual gloss and respectability.

Only through a return to the cosmopolitan ideal can there be any hope of harmony and decency in the relations between black, white and other Americans. Sociologically, this means that there must be the restoration of a firm commitment to those imperatives of modern industrial society that the best tradition of the social sciences has clearly articulated: the universalist norm whereby the performances of all men are judged by a single standard of efficiency and competence, the rule of law and of equality before the law; equality of opportunity balanced by a judicious concern for the equality of results; and to forms of social conditioning that are congruent with the work ethic.

Culturally, it means a rejection of fragmentary group identities and a continued search for those values that bind people together as individual human beings rather than labeled representatives of primordially inspired groupings. It means, also, the final rejection of the deep-seated passion for permanence, implying, in turn, a rejection, on the social level, of all commitments to traditionalism, and acceptance of the fact that the most central and salient feature of modern society is change; on the individual level, this means a rejection of the parallel commitment to the identity myth, and an acceptance, rather than a fear, of the challenges of change.

"Isn't the individual we most admire," Bennett Berger asked recently, "the man who never finds an identity because he is too busy accumulating being: a 'free man' at home in a society in which all traditional institutions are tottering?" He did not hazard an answer, but it was not necessary, since it was to precisely this question that Gordon Allport, a decade earlier, ad-

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dressed himself in one of his last, and most lucid works, *Becoming*. Allport, that most cosmopolitan of social scientists, saw two conflicting forces at work in man: one that "makes for a closed tribal being," the other that creates an undying "demand for autonomy." What seemed to trouble Allport most, toward the end of his years, was the fact that the discipline to which he had devoted his life had returned "unashamedly" to the nineteenth-century concept of "self," with all its question-begging ambiguities and moral dangers. He saw with a clear, slightly despairing eye, the terrible dilemma that modern psychology faces—the fact that, in seeking to liberate man from his most primeval fears and chattels, "it has trimmed down the image of man that gave birth to the democratic dream" and has created "an empty organism, pushed by drives and moulded by environmental circumstance."

It is this conception of man as an identity-enhancing, group-hungry and culture-dependent conformist, that supports the cancerous growth of ethnicity, parochialism, and the totalitarian tendency to treat other human beings as means toward ends, rather than as ends in themselves; to see human beings in terms of tribal blocks—Jews, Gentiles, blacks, honkeys, females, WASPs, whatnot—rather than as unique, autonomous beings.

And it is this conception of man that those of us—threatened, despised, outrageously naïve—who wish to revive the cosmopolitan ideal must now reject without fear or trembling. While recognizing the inner and outer forces that shape our lives, it is necessary to reaffirm, with Allport, the all-important fact that "the theory of democracy requires also that man possess a measure of rationality, a portion of freedom, a generic conscience, propriate ideals, and unique value."

For those of us who are white, the best that can be done for black people is not to act directly on their behalf, but to reject ethnicity and parochialism and to return to the strongest possible commitment to the cosmopolitan ideal. For those of us who are black, such a commitment is no longer a matter of choice, but one of necessity and sheer survival.

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Educational Innovations: Treasure and Dross

MORTIMER SMITH

Those who complain of the slow pace of change in social institutions ought to be encouraged by what is happening these days in American elementary and secondary schools. The natural tendency of schools has always been toward ossification, but in recent years the school system has been unable to resist the general push within the society to topple entrenched traditions, and has inaugurated ambitious instructional and organizational changes. These are taking place under the general heading of "innovation," a word that manages to suggest something more novel, glamorous and dramatic than simple "change."

The willingness to experiment and to abandon old methods and programs is in evidence in all parts of the country. In a high school in Montgomery County, Maryland, there are no bells, failure is never entered on a student's transcript, and there is a flourishing "hall culture," which means that on any given day you can find students sprawled on the floor in the halls, playing guitars or reading or gossiping. A middle school in Florida consists of a large open floor space with no partitions dividing teaching areas, library and chemistry lab, the whole looking a little like Grand Central Station with wall-to-wall carpeting. In Fairfax County, Virginia, a high school student serves as a voting member of the school board and receives a salary of $3,000 a year. In Berkeley, California, there is an "alternative" high school where everyone is encouraged to do his own thing and where the principal is quoted as saying: "We just don't consider anything that we can't enforce as an infraction." (A student put it another way: "Everything we want, we get.") In scores of school districts in North Dakota, as well as in many individual schools throughout the country, the curriculum is based on the "open classroom" concept, an innovation not easily defined but one that calls for informality and "creativity," freedom of movement for the child, a soft-pedaling of the pressure for academic success, and a somewhat excessive amount of tie-dyeing, lying on the floor, field trips, and the collecting of gerbils and turtles. In some schools reading is taught with the aid of the initial teaching alphabet, a phonetic alphabet that adds twenty new symbols to the conventional alphabet, and results in compositions ("Wee can reed and wee can riet on a pees of pæper") that remind one vaguely of the prose style of Josh Billings and Artemus Ward. In other schools children are trying to learn to read by a system that presents words and sounds in color—forty-seven different colors; the *t* sound becomes "the magenta sound," the *s* sound, "the pearly green sound." Some school systems use computers in teaching the basic skills; some remain open all year; others have abandoned report cards or have done away with grades or have established "storefront" schools. Voucher plans are in effect in a few places, giving parents the right

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to choose among a number of public schools. Some schools have entered into "performance contracting" with private firms to teach the basic skills, usually with financial penalties exacted against the company if the students show poor achievement.

These are but a few of the educational innovations that have been tried in the last few years. Another that is advocated probably should be described as a terminal operation rather than an innovation—the idea of "deschooling" advanced by Ivan Illich and by the late Paul Goodman and others. The advocates of deschooling believe that compulsory education laws, degrees, diplomas and formal courses are evils and that young people can learn all they need to learn by roaming the community, free from the restraints and compromises inevitable in the social institution of the school. The theory behind deschooling is that the only cure for a headache is decapitation.

Why such a clamor for innovation? Why such a demand for any new method or program so long as it is radically different from the old? Perhaps the demand for change can be put in perspective by considering some recent educational history. After World War II, dissatisfaction with public education accelerated rapidly and by the late 1950s, spurred in part by Sputnik, the critics had drawn up a fairly precise bill of complaints. They charged poor teacher preparation; low achievement among pupils in the basic skills, especially in reading; inadequate standards for the academic subjects; a proliferation of nonessential or trival courses; and the domination of public education by a rigid and often anti-intellectual establishment consisting of the schools of education, state departments of education, the United States Office of Education, and national teacher associations. There were, of course, honorable exceptions to the prevailing view in all these institutions, but after World War II "one of the striking features of American thought," in the words of the late Richard Hofstadter (in his *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*), "was the appearance within professional education of an influential anti-intellectualist movement." Hofstadter's contention was that the dominant group in professional education believed that practical training in being family members, consumers and citizens was the primary aim of education, not intellectual development and cumulative knowledge.

By the early 1960s, when the problems of educating the "disadvantaged" in so-called ghetto schools came to the fore, the critics added some new items to their original bill of complaint, asserting that many city schools were dreary places staffed by administrators and teachers who were indifferent to, or contemptuous of, their students, and that city school systems were more often than not inflexible and stultifying bureaucracies.

These criticisms were made from a particular philosophical point of view about the purposes of schools; that is, the critics believed that while schools might have subsidiary purposes, the primary purposes are to teach the essential skills and transmit the heritage of civilized man and in the process to train the intelligence and to stimulate the pleasures of thought. The critics naturally wanted change, change that would strengthen the curriculum, improve the quality of teaching and eliminate some of the academic trivia.

As one of the veterans of the educational controversies that arose in the years after World War II, I cannot remember that any of us ever used the word "innovation" when we discussed plans for reforming the schools. Even so late as ten years ago that word had not yet appeared in the *Education Index*. In the most recent volume of this index the entries under "innovation" are measured in columns. With the change in terminology came a shift in philosophical bias. While some of the more mechanical current innovations are philosophically neutral, others stem from points of view about education that are at odds with the older tradition that the school ought to be a place where intellect, if not counted supreme, is at least respected. The movement for innovation has introduced

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a new form of anti-intellectualism to American schools, based not on adjustment to the social environment, which is the form the older anti-intellectualism took, but on asserting the supremacy of feeling over intellect.

Those who want rational changes in the schools and who are working for realizable reforms find some of the current innovations useful and demonstrably effective. Others are bizarre, if not nonsensical, and seem to take little note of the realities of the school situation. In sorting out the vast number of innovations I discern four categories of persons who now advocate change for American schools. The first group are the utopian society-changers who believe schools are the rotten instrument of a rotten society and should be destroyed and rebuilt. (Some of them—Illich, for example—are stronger on the demolition than the reconstruction.) The second group are the neo-progressives who want schools to be places of freedom, joy and ecstasy. They are probably influenced more by the late A. S. Neill and his Summerhill School than by the Lincoln School-Progressive Education Association tradition of American progressivism. The third group are the technicians who think that our shortcomings can be corrected by the large-scale introduction of machinery and other packaged aids in the instructional program, aids they hope to make teacher-proof. And finally, there are those, among whom I number myself, who might be called the renovators. I am not particularly attached to the term—it sounds like patching up and disguising rather than changing things fundamentally—but in lieu of a better word I use it to refer to those who believe that the basic structure and many of the aspects of school organization are sound but who think that we must repair the damage that has resulted from faulty aims and methods and inadequate teachers.

The utopian society-changers are represented by such men as Ivan Illich, Edgar Z. Friedenberg, the late Paul Goodman, and to a certain degree, John Holt. The latter, in his early and immensely popular books, proved to be an old-fashioned progressive searching for better ways to motivate and teach young children, but more recently he seems to have lost faith in the usefulness of direct teaching. Increasingly his position seems to be that tests, teachers and subject matter are so corrupting that schools are not salvageable. His position is similar to that of another popular teacher-writer, James Herndon, who states in *How to Survive in Your Native Land* that the school "is *absolutely irrelevant* to the lives of children, who don't need school at all." Goodman and Friedenberg's opposition to schools seems to be grounded in philosophical anarchism, in a distaste for all institutional and group activity. Friedenberg is particularly incensed that young Americans in school and college are serfs, prisoners in a cruel adult world, who are "powerless and without resources." This remark was made at the end of the sixties, a decade when several college presidents were harried from office and many educational institutions were intimidated and even shut down by these "powerless" student-serfs. Paul Goodman was convinced that schools are a waste of time and often contended that the child up to the age of twelve needs no formal subjects and that the present eight-year curriculum of the elementary school could be telescoped into four months. (That's right, *months*.)

I do not know that all of the critics mentioned agree completely with Illich's demands for dismantling the school system. They are all certainly in agreement with him that, as presently constituted, schools are the natural enemies of youthful spontaneity and youthful eagerness to learn and that the educational process ought to be revitalized and revolutionized as part of the larger scheme to rebuild the present unsatisfactory society. I vacillate in my judgment of the practical influence of these men. Sometimes they appear to be simply a little coterie of eccentrics who write laudatory reviews of one another's books in the *New York Review of Books*. They do seem, however, to have an influence among new and idealistic young teachers who are nervous about exerting authority in the

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classroom; and a rather masochistic educational establishment continues to give them a forum at innumerable conferences. But surely it is unrealistic to believe that any considerable number of educators and parents could be brought to accept the radical proposals of the society-changers.

I suppose there is a certain amount of overlapping between the second group of innovators, the neo-progressives, and the society-changers. The former, like the latter, are profoundly unhappy with American schools, but they are not so pessimistic about the possibilities for reform, believing that schools can be rejuvenated if only we will stop using academic attainment as the chief measure of effectiveness. The neo-progressive movement, especially as reflected in the open classroom concept, has been strongly influenced by Charles E. Silberman's *Crisis in the Classroom,* one of the most popular educational books of recent years. Although Silberman has more respect for intellectual matters and academic accomplishment than most of the other neo-progressives, his book is primarily a sober and lengthy sermon exposing American schools as grim, joyless and coercive places, and recommending various informal pedagogical practices that suggest he might have been communing with the ghosts of William Heard Kilpatrick and Teachers College Columbia circa 1920.

The neo-progressives are inclined to think that a teacher who asserts authority, organizes his subject and gives tests is an enemy of children. In a large number of innovations, including many (certainly not all) of the programs that come under the general heading of the open classroom, the "cognitive" has given way to the "affective," which often means that feeling takes place over thought, emotion over intellect, spontaneous action over reflection. The purpose of schools—so runs the argument—is not to exercise Johnny's mind; it is to make him feel good, to enhance his self-image. It does not seem to occur to some of these advocates of "affective" education that Johnny's image of himself is powerfully enhanced when he discovers that he can read and write and do his sums.

The older progressive movement in education had its extremists, but the best advocates of the child-centered school never thought that the child at the center meant any diminution of the role of intellectual training. Nor were the older progressives inclined to accept the sentimental legend of the Beautiful Children and the Ugly Adults. Today's neo-progressives bring to mind a *New Yorker* cartoon of several years ago that showed a school principal talking to a juvenile menace and his mother. The schoolman was saying: "Mrs. Minton, there's no such thing as a bad boy. Hostile, perhaps, aggressive, recalcitrant, destructive, even sadistic. But not bad."

The sentimentalism of the neo-progressives is particularly unfortunate when applied to inner-city schools. When they dismiss academic accomplishment for students in these schools as "irrelevant" or at best peripherally important, express impatience with Negro parents who want the schools to teach their children to read, extoll such claimed lower-class values as energy, spontaneity, and direct sense gratification, and encourage the use of a supposedly valid language known as black English—when the neo-progressives impose this sort of sentimentalism on the inner-city schools, they drive one more separatist wedge between races and between classes.

My third group of innovators, the technicians, differ radically from the first two groups. Not for them the freewheeling flexibility and the preoccupation with the psyche of the learner that mark the other groups. As producers of packaged curricula, some of which are of the machine variety and some not, their programs are highly structured and designed to teach precise segments of a curriculum. Around the technicians a new industry has sprung up in recent years that produces classroom computers, data-processing systems, programmed instruction materials, and other curriculum materials, mostly designed to be teacher-proof.

The "hardware boys" who sell this equipment are not the only ones who are sanguine about the future of technology in the schools. John W. Gardner, not one

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given to intemperate statement, expressed the view, when he was secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, that "the judicious use of videotape, programmed instruction, computer-assisted instruction and other new approaches holds promise of a truly immense gain in the availability of the highest quality of instruction. I'll say something even stronger. It is, in my opinion, the *only* hope for a radical upgrading of educational quality on a massive scale."

In my view, computer-assisted instruction (C.A.I.) is most useful as elementary drill at the rote level of what-does-five-plus-three-equal or with any subject matter that calls for exact responses. Reading instruction by the look-and-say, Dick-and-Jane method is no better when transferred from the basal reader to the machine. The qualities of imagination and interpretation and speculation cannot be built into the machine. And often equipment that is advertised as being designed with the individual student in mind is run with the protection of the machines in mind. Anthony G. Oettinger in his excellent book on the myths of educational innovation (*Run, Computer, Run*) says that in one language laboratory the printed rules state, "Please do not ask unnecessary questions about [this equipment]" and "No one is an individual in the laboratory."

Whatever the virtues of technological innovations—and I for one do not dismiss all such innovations as useless—they have failed to make much of an impact on the schools. Ten years ago reading instruction was to be revolutionized by the talking typewriter. Today this miracle device, along with many other machine programs, seems to have gone the way of the Edsel. Perhaps the most ambitious project in computer-assisted instruction, Stanford University's Institute for Mathematical Studies in the Social Sciences, sends its programs by leased wire to not much more than one hundred schools, hardly an impressive figure. Seven years ago an assistant United States commissioner of education, and an enthusiast for C.A.I., predicted that by 1976 computers would be operational in twenty-five percent of our schools, surely a fantastically optimistic estimate. Accurate figures are hard to find, but in 1970 a survey by the research division of the National Education Association showed that less than one percent of teachers responding to the survey had used C.A.I. in their classes. After years of generous foundation and government support, the technological revolution in schools simply has not arrived.

In talking with educators and parents about current innovations, one senses a growing caution, sometimes even disillusionment. There are many indications of dissatisfaction. Last year the Ford Foundation issued a reflective report on its ten-year support of the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan, which plan was aimed at "legitimizing the concept of innovation in public school programs and at testing various kinds of innovation." For the most part, the innovations the plan helped to finance were changes in arrangements and materials: programmed instruction, filmstrips, modular scheduling, changed seating plans, removal of walls, et cetera. The Ford report is a frank appraisal that comes to the conclusion that many of the innovations were a disappointment and that the results did not come close to justifying the $30 million that the project cost. Harold Howe II, vice-president of Ford's division of education and research, has been quoted as saying that "we're getting a little more humble. The old idea that we could build a better model and that it would serve as a lighthouse for other school systems was naïve."

The more extreme innovations have also come in for reexamination, often by the practitioners themselves. One of the most unstructured of the innovative schools, John Adams High in Portland, Oregon, where the teacher "tells the student neither what he is to do, what he is to learn, nor how," is taking a second look at its program. In an article in *Phi Delta Kappan,* the head of the instructional program at the school, Allen L. Dobbins, indicated that the students themselves were expressing unhappiness with their unlimited freedom. Some of them thought "they weren't learning anything, that teachers didn't make

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them do any work." In the new city of Reston, Virginia, an elementary school that has been operating for some time as an open-space school, has now erected six-foot-high partitions in the hope of cutting down on noise and visual distraction and to provide space for chalkboards and the students' papers—in short, the open-space school is closing up again.

Even some of the utopian society-changers are uneasy. Neil Postman, professor of education at New York University, a self-described radical, dissident, and hater of the school establishment, has decided that he cannot accept Ivan Illich and, quoting the Declaration of Independence on the unwisdom of changing long established governments for light and transient causes, says the same passage is relevant to schools. Jonathan Kozol, who is angry with the whole American economic and social system, including the schools, nevertheless has decided to operate his own "free school" for poor children along traditional lines. He thinks affluent young teachers who are slumming in the free schools ought to teach the basic skills to poor children instead of encouraging them to "make clay vases, weave Indian headbands, play with Polaroid cameras, climb over geodesic domes."

What, then, are the prospects for needed reforms in the schools? Certainly they are poor if we are looking for some kind of miracle pill—a new social order, a way to change the hearts of men, a foolproof machine, some ideal rearrangement of space, the cultivation of joy unconfined in the lives of teachers and schoolchildren. My own conviction is that we must fall back on the recommendations of my last category of advocates of change, the renovators. These may not have the "dramatic," "exciting" and "dynamic" characteristics that the utopians look for in schemes for change, but for the long pull they may be the most effective.

I cannot in a short article offer a precise blueprint for reform but can simply indicate some "areas," as we say in education, where reform may be realizable. But first of all, I think the renovators want to settle the matter of aims and purposes. Any proposals they make for change are grounded in the conviction that schools exist to *teach,* to provide young people—all young people, not only the mentally superior—with knowledge that will be useful both in the utilitarian, vocational sense, and in the sense of providing some inner resources by which to live. In the process of education it must be assumed that the teacher knows more than the student and must have authority over him, exercised, one hopes, not capriciously but with humanity, understanding and benevolence.

Operating from these premises about education, the renovators maintain that some needed reforms can be achieved if we are content, or at least willing, to proceed patiently and without expectation of instant miracles. Among these reforms are better teacher education, improved reading instruction, higher aspirations for disadvantaged children, and the breaking down of educational bureaucracies.

Some progress is being made with several of these reforms. Although low reading achievement, especially in the large cities, is still something of a national scandal, there is evident around the country a refreshing willingness to buck the "reading establishment" with its outmoded whole-word method of teaching reading and to experiment with some of the effective phonics-based programs now available. An increasing number of teachers and principals are ignoring the sociological folklore about the traumatizing effect of "middle-class" education on children in the ghetto and are making the teaching of the basic skills their prime responsibility. And some progress is being made, in some places, in breaking down educational bureaucracies into manageable units. Unfortunately the "community control" movement has often been used by ideologues for noneducational purposes, but decentralization and honest lay participation in the conduct of schools are now possible realities.

At the heart of all reform of the schools, of course, is the problem of how to obtain and train good teachers. We could make some dent in this problem if we would

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increase our efforts to encourage bright rather than mediocre high school students to enter teaching, if undergraduate work for the prospective teacher were confined to broad liberal education with the how-to courses limited to summer sessions and internships, and if we could obtain some relief from the systems of tenure and automatic pay scales now in effect. Under the present system it is difficult to get rid of the incompetent or to pay preferential salaries to the competent.

This is not an easy time for those who see the necessity for change in the schools and are trying to work out rational principles for reforms that can operate successfully in the existing system. (Not being a utopian, I assume that the system is going to be around for a while.) It is not an easy time because on the one hand the innovators urge us either to tear down or completely remake the school system and on the other hand the reports of James Coleman and Christopher Jencks seem to tell us that what the schools do doesn't make any difference in the future lives of the students. Perhaps the first step on the road to effective change in the schools is resistance on the part of educators and parents to all absolutist positions.

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Quietude, the Apocalypse and Nostalgia: A Decade of Teaching

HOWARD R. WOLF

For years, it seemed that my contemporaries and I belonged to no generation, at least as I would have used the word to describe the "lost" generation, or those of the thirties (the Great Depression), or the forties (the war years). Those of us in college during the 1950s were, of course, living through the Eisenhower years, the cold war at its chilliest, and the McCarthy era, but we did not feel connected to these forces and issues. We were against Ike, saw McCarthy as a menace, and did not want to sell out to Madison Avenue. But our position was one of negativism. We lived with a sense of loss and absence, but when it came right down to it, we did not know what had been lost or was missing, because we had not been, or stood "for," anything. Once my freshman roommate and I walked across the town common on a soundless, crystalline winter night looking, like Antonioni characters, for a cause, but could not find one and had a pizza instead. And one spring, a well-heeled and multicolumned fraternity decided to give a lawn party for the "poor kids" in town, but they couldn't find any, so they made martinis (very dry, of course), lobbed frisbees, and sported with tartan-clad girls.

We did not think of going to Paris to meet Sylvia Beach and write the great American novel; we had not been to the dust bowl or felt the betrayal of the Hitler-Stalin pact; we had not gone to Europe to fight fascism and then finish college on the G.I. Bill, although we took on some of the veterans' experienced looks and gestures and wore their gear. The adults we knew had touched history somewhere—in the Lower East Side, at a café, at a rally in Union Square, through a Norden bombsight (a magical object to those of us reared on war movies), but we were just afloat and floating, just going to college, or so it seemed, as we would have said to anyone who asked us what we did.

Rushing ahead somewhat in this micro-generational autobiography, it seems, in retrospect, that we were becoming experts in nostalgia, and it is no wonder, now that we have come of age, that our movies, I mean the ones created by my contemporaries—*The Last Picture Show; Play It Again, Sam; The Summer of '42; Love Story; Easy Rider; Five Easy Pieces*—are bathed in nostalgia. Nor is it surprising to me that many of my friends are in film and media. Our experience has always been mediated at a remove from the real. Our war was *The Purple Heart;* our suffering, *The Grapes of Wrath;* and our twenties (glamour), photographs of Zelda and Fitzgerald at Cap d'Antibes. I once saw a girl glide through the fountain at the Plaza Hotel in New York after a prom in 1954,

✪ "Quietude, the Apocalypse and Nostalgia" is the title piece of HOWARD R. WOLF's recently-completed collection of essays on education and American culture. Mr. Wolf, an associate professor of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo, is co-author, with Roger Porter, of *The Voice Within: Reading and Writing Autobiography*. He is now writing a book on education of the future.

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and knew that she had read *Tender Is the Night.* We even exchanged Fitzgeraldian glances. Given my sense of things, it is fitting that Sontag and Warhol, fifties people, should have advanced camp and pop, aesthetics of nostalgia, into the American scene. In place of real experience, we were, without knowing it, learning to reinvent the past and circumvent the present. Our fiction and that of a half generation before us would show that later: Barth, Brautigan, Pynchon, Kesey, Leonard Cohen, Roth and Updike. We would all become *The Boys of Summer,* in time, in different ways.

But while we thought that we were idling, posed on the runway without a flight plan, and before we knew that we were becoming expert at filling in an apparent vacuum with nostalgia and a sense of the past, some of us were taking literature and a certain approach to it seriously —not as a counterenvironment, as I might see it now, but as a refinement of consciousness. We used to joke and say that we lacked a direct object in our experience and speech, that we were only "aware of. . . ." But we did not doubt that *aware of* part. It seemed our destiny. Being a part of the fifties was to be *aware of awareness* and the writers who stood for well-wrought self-consciousness: Henry James, Jane Austen, E. M. Forster, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and the seventeenth-century poets. Every person we admired was turned inward, every concept and style folded into itself: James Dean, Marlon Brando, method acting, action painting—even the two-handed set-shot, which began decorously at the wrist, came up to the eye level (we wanted, like James, *to see*), and then snapped, in a studied arc, toward the hoop. We focused on the form of consciousness (awareness), not content. And the form was containment. Perhaps we were like Dulles in the end.

But we would not know that for some time: not until the mid-sixties did we begin to feel discomfort with this point of view. Then, in the face of political and social pressures within and without the university (the most important, the war in Vietnam) and in the face of *apocalyptic* and revelatory claims about inner realities set forth by humanistic educators (John Holt), psychologists (Fritz Perls), culture heroes (R. D. Laing) and visionary poets (Ginsberg and Gary Snyder)—in the face of both these forces, then, we would have to ask ourselves, what can we do with our awareness, our sensibility, our sensitivity? And, in asking that question, I, for one, became aware that I was really asking, "Can I contain experience through awareness by making it literary, and even if I can, will that be enough?"

Again, am I flashing forward? Is that my subject? To dissolve my theme in attitude? It would not surprise me. It is a characteristic fifties gesture—like posturing in front of Starks on Broadway waiting for a Saturday night to pass (remember *Marty?*), or waiting for the Rosenbergs and Chessman to die, knowing the inevitability, but mustering attitudes anyway. As I have said, we were becoming experts in mulling over the past—even the present.

So when I, and some of my friends, set out to teach in the early sixties, we had one thing clearly in mind: mind, awareness, a muted assault upon the limited and betraying consciousness of Madison Avenue. It seemed to us that, if we could not affect the national temper of life (we were already psychic minimalists), we could, at least, convert a student here and there to our way of privatism and personalism. If it did not feel like a return to the values of Bloomsbury, it was because we lacked their genius, because the literary tools we had acquired to implement our awareness (the New Criticism) had been machine-tooled to precision and not handcrafted like the art criticism of Roger Fry. At the same time, it did not feel hermetic, because we felt that we were part of a community of other privatists with some shared assumptions.

Without hoping for too much or too little (my voice becomes increasingly Eliotic), we fanned out to spread the word with some modesty and a hidden, scaled-down evangelicalism. We knew that we were taking our place in society with everyone else

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(even those who had gone to the Harvard B-school), but we felt that our place was, although invisible, potentially influential. We could even imagine our awareness of taste and human distinctions (the values that were blurred on TV ads) reaching *someone* in power.

When J.F.K. was elected and met Mailer and heard Casals, it seemed to us that he knew, magically, that we were "out there." His knowing made our mission public in some coded way; and attacks upon him validated our task and even made us feel self-righteous. In some ways, it occurs to me now, he was a model professor. Touch football and Cape Cod reminded us of summer vacations and brought back, behind that, images and sounds of softball—for which all of my friends and some writers who grew up in the fifties have a special fondness. The quietude and pastoralism of the wide-ranging outfield spoke to us. If John Kennedy had not been assassinated, we might have joined history, believing it possible that men and women of sensibility and awareness could, perhaps, enter the public arena without selling out, without compromising their sense of integrity. Many of us believed that public speech itself was necessarily rhetoric, and rhetoric a betrayal of consciousness. Although we would not have invoked Orwell then—he spoke out of an ideological context that was alien to us—there was a sense that all public utterances were a form of Newspeak. But Kennedy seemed able, somehow, to preserve *his* voice in the public sphere. His unwillingness to become entirely the occasion he moved in, his resistance to preset role-playing (filling in a preestablished political scenario) became a new kind of role: the Kennedy image. If J.F.K. had not been assassinated, we might have moved, as I have said, into history. It might even have happened later with Robert Kennedy, but we were two-time losers in our search for history.

Except, then, for a brief period (from fall, 1962 to fall, 1963, my first year of teaching), it was hard to imagine a bridge between our job as teachers of literature and the world. It is at this point that the central paradox defines itself: how can I talk about missing history, a sense of absence, nostalgia, when, in so many ways, history was fought out during the sixties on college campuses by students and professors lending their weight to social issues: racism, the war, ecology, university reform, a new spiritualism? Literature, as *we* had known it, was written off as irrelevant, and age, however prematurely invoked, became a decisive factor. Except for some teachers my age, who gave themselves over completely to protest, most who joined and marched did so with an uneasy sense that they were sympathetic to the moral and political content of the issues but skeptical, even frightened, of the style and tactics; or they experienced protest as an ecstasy of sorts and then, as they say, came down.

In the midst of confrontation, there was a feeling that the message was right, but the medium out of hand. We had added content to our world view but had not relinquished form. As we moved closer to students on the strike *issues,* the sense of differences—the overreaching of boundaries, the failure of control, the use of explosives and drugs that were "dynamite"—in *style* became more pronounced. As teachers we were in the curious position of being part of an establishment that was challenging the establishment. And if our students were in the same bind, they did not acknowledge it openly. It seemed inevitable that it was for us, "the elders," to justify and vindicate ourselves (aging, as I have said, took place quickly in the late sixties). Most teachers made some effort to achieve some kind of rapprochement, although some retrenched (but I cannot speak for them). As important, I think, as the public attempts to meet the generation of the sixties—attending meetings, signing petitions, giving bail money, writing letters on behalf of conscientious objectors, even going to jail (forty-five of my colleagues were arrested and finally acquitted on charges of entering a building in violation of an injunction while protesting the presence of four hundred city police on campus)—were the shifts in classroom attitude and method:

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the place where students and teachers really face one another.

In a way, the changes that took place in the culture at large were mirrored step by step in classrooms across the country, beginning, I would say, during 1966-1967, without teachers, at that time, being fully aware of the larger implications of what was taking place. It was, for example, during 1966-1967, after some tentative and un-self-conscious efforts toward freeing the space in the classroom in the previous years (1962-1966), that I first thought of the class as a *group* holding the possibility of a shared attempt at trust and openness. It was only during the summer of 1967 at a be-in (how remote that phrase seems now) in Ann Arbor, where I was completing my graduate study, that I realized how my efforts toward shared experience in the classroom reflected broader tribal tendencies in the culture. But I still felt that these efforts were a reflection of, not an engagement with, the culture. I was not so much *in* history as running alongside it. At least that was the way it felt. No matter how much I extended my methods, the students reached further out, testing new, if tenuous, limits of behavior and perception. Every step I took toward the synthesis of literary study and modes of self-realization was left behind in the wake of experimental extensions of action and consciousness: drugs, communal living, nonverbal communication, self-purifying diets, meditation, alpha-wave feedback. Survival, sixties style, had become a fad.

From 1967 to 1970, I tried to keep up. During this time, I moved from an awareness of group behavior to enactments of group process: to modes of classroom interaction derived from the humanistic theories of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow; and from the educational theory of A. S. Neill, Paul Goodman, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Edgar Friedenberg, Jonathan Kozol, Herbert Kohl, Kenneth Koch, John Dewey, George B. Leonard, et al. I went as far as I would go in the fall and winter of 1969-1970. During that semester, I planned to teach a course on the literature and theory of mental crisis in which we were to read, for example, established texts such as Gogol's *Diary of a Madman,* Dostoevsky's *The Possessed,* and some of the basic works of Freud, Jung and R. D. Laing. In less than a month the students made it clear that they preferred to discuss and write about their own psychological autobiographies than to approach the subject at a distance. I had misgivings about this project, but, swept up by the temper of the times, I went along for the swim and almost drowned.

We did learn a great deal about ourselves, the foundations of a learning experience, and the conflicts underlying the strike that would dominate our campus a few months later, and we did reach shore. But I half knew at the end of the semester that my age of pronounced experiment was over for a while. I could not, finally, as a teacher of literature accept the death of a literary tradition, this sense of an ending that had become so popular beneath the standards of McLuhan, Norman O. Brown, Susan Sontag and the survival culture. And I believed strongly, having read widely in psychology, that our experience had become too therapeutic; that, even if the approach was valid, I was not properly trained to deal with it; that what I was advancing would mean the end of the university as I had known it. I found myself calling everything into question, but still acting as the questioner, the teacher. Did I want to give up that role? And I felt that my students were being prepared only for an imaginary and theoretical future. What would happen if history turned on them, as it has, and they were not prepared to get on with the daily tasks of making history over an indefinite period of time? What if they were not even to have the experience of failed idealism through literature, were not even to rehearse the complexities of disappointment?

One colleague had for years been telling me that his own dark mission was to initiate his students into a tragic view of life, to make them aware of their own mortality and finitude. He would come to mind in the midst of my attempts at innovation.

In a certain way, the strike at Buffalo, as much as I was caught up in it, gave me

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time to think about my future as a teacher, because there were few classes that spring and most of them were focused on the strike issues and, after that, Cambodia and Kent State. What interests me now about those discussions, with respect to my own increasingly tempered attitudes toward education, is that they were articulate and often very intelligent. Where I had found students silent before literary texts, they became vocal and passionate (even rational) discussing R.O.T.C., defense contracts and tenure decisions, and they had read Marx, Marcuse, Paul Goodman, et al. If their tastes were predictable, they were no more so than my own undergraduate reading: Empson, C. Wright Mills, Fromm, Riesman. But when it came to the implementation of these ideas, all boundaries collapsed. Liberals became rightists; centrists, "pigs"; and when there were meetings with administrators who, given the forces at work, were ready to make significant concessions, the ante went up and the game was lost. Once again, for me, form and content were at odds. I respected the moral energy of the students, but I wanted it shaped, controlled. These were only half-awarenesses at the time.

When the summer of 1970 came, I went to the Northwest to work on a book with a friend (few people I knew ever gave up their projects through these years) and found myself reading, to relax, books dealing with the Tradition: Kitto on the Greeks, Collingwood's *Autobiography*, A. C. Bradley on Shakespeare. Sitting on a headrock looking across the Juan de Fuca Straits at the Olympic Mountain Range rising straight from the sea, cut at its base by a fog bank, I wrote a letter to a friend and poet and made an unexpected, Arnoldian case for the life of the mind, the criticism of life. He and I tend only to speak about softball, and I think that he is still bewildered about what I wrote to him that summer.

When I returned in the fall, the campus was especially quiet. It came as a relief (one could actually imagine teaching for a whole semester!). It also came as a disappointment. A conservative engineer had been named president, and liberal faculty *(this time)* wanted opposition from the students. But there was to be no third wave after the strikes of 1970 and Kent State-Cambodia. The Revolutionary Theater, as Robert Brustein has called it, had, it seemed, dropped its curtain and thrown away its scenario. Every generation tests its limits and, willingly or unwillingly, steps back from the outer boundary to a position beyond the old boundary. But still I felt as if the counterculture could not be dead, and this provoked two contradictory impulses in me: to continue my student-centered approach to education, not to get swept to my right by prevailing winds; and, at the same time, to head upwind, to move back into a "course" orientation.

It seemed as if I would have to move forward and backward at the same time: to continue my explorations but to reclaim some lost intellectual ground. I had planned to teach a course on post-Second World War II American drama, putting the emphasis on the structure of the family (it seemed the inescapable theme), and, as things were unfolding, the subject fit the moment well. The backgrounds and experiences of the class led into the themes of the plays: *Long Day's Journey, Death of a Salesman, The Glass Menagerie,* and so on.

Too often in American education, texts are not thought of in terms of the specific phase of development that the students are going through. In this case, the issues at stake for the students were *in* the plays: the positive and negative values of the nuclear family, generational conflict, the use and misuse of fantasy. Without getting away from the texts, it was possible to ask students to draw analogies between the texts and their experience. Since the plays described, in the main, middle-class family life, analogies came easily.

In the spring, in a course on modern American poetry, I tried again to achieve a balance between the personal and impersonal—but in a different way. Instead of asking students to personalize the "established" poems, or to impersonalize them, I gave every other class to student poems—and made it clear that my aim was not to

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decide which poems were best. Rather, I was interested in exploring the experience of each poem. If a student poem could unfold a Richard Wilbur poem, or if Wallace Stevens shed light on us, so much the better. But the intention was not to opt for one against the other. Although I now have second thoughts about the obliteration of distinctions, the erasure of values, I wonder if so large a class as I had (about forty students) could, in any other way, have turned out as many satisfying poems. My second thoughts touch, briefly, attitudes toward maintaining an aesthetic hierarchy—although there is a natural, even reflexive, impulse to rank one's tastes and passions.

They concern, instead, notions that good poetry provides models of the necessary struggle, through language, for discovery. Too often student poetry is facile and uninteresting—the severest judgment one can make about a young adult's experience—because the most available language is seized as an adequate expression of individual experience. When a highly energized generational argot presents itself as a kind of linguistic ready-made (found object) and when there is a common fund of shared experience (both conditions were operative in the mid-to-late-sixties), the difficulty of writing poetry is seemingly reduced. If anything, though, it becomes more difficult, because socially compelling language must be recreated and reimagined before it takes on the life of an individual voice. But in the midst of strong communal impulses and vanguard tendencies toward anonymity (John Cage) and self-effacement (Living Theater), it was not always entirely clear where I wanted to make a case for individual expression. In the last class, one of the students who had been writing songs played and sang them on his guitar. In their openness and directness, they seem, in retrospect, to sum up the spirit of that particular moment in American educational, if not cultural, history.

This past year has been a time for reflection for me, a time to reconsider my explorations in education over a decade of teaching. It now seems possible to me, in ways that require subtle and careful articulation, to teach a person-centered class without relinquishing commitments to education and to literary study as a rational criticism of life. It is possible to move toward freedom within the closed frame of the classroom, but it was important for me to discover at what point the frame begins to tremor, to discover, that is, how humanly nuanced a discussion can be without becoming psychotherapeutic and anti-intellectual in tenor.

There are times, of course, when I think of the high points of campus energy and its risk-taking sense of promise. A few weeks ago, two of my former students were hitching on Main Street, geared with backpacks and orange nylon Alpine ski parkas. I stopped and asked them where they (Bob and Ray, seriously!) were going.

"West," they answered in unison.

"For the Primal Scream?"

"It's one of the things we want to get into," Bob said.

I wished them well and drove them two miles west. When they got out, I felt a sense of loss, for their presence, for a generation, for a part of myself. Looking for all the world like an animated Joseph Cornell assemblage called *Possibility: The 1960s,* their leaving flooded me with nostalgia.

A few days later I had lunch with another former student, someone I had known for seven years, beginning with his first year at the University of Michigan. An all-state wrestler and debater, he had moved from civil rights to S.D.S., to Weatherman politics, drugs and meditation. Now he had given up almost everything, including hope, except caring for the child of the woman he lived with as a friend. All through our conversation, I felt the tenuous and inappropriate basis of my nostalgia. It was impossible for me not to be aware of his sadness and the severe risks he had run. Once again, I was aware of history, off to the side. When we parted, he asked me where I was going *for the summer.* And I asked him how he was going *to live.* These seemed to be the questions defining and separating our lives. The irony of all this is that I will probably spend most of my life encouraging students to achieve a mea-

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sure of the freedom I could not accept in its apocalyptic fullness.

If it is difficult to let go of a child, it is almost unimaginable to let go of a generation. What began in the fifties as a sense of personalism and quietude has been transformed by the sixties into historical abandonment.

Perhaps someday my contemporaries will discover history. I doubt it. We are destined, I think, to become biographers and autobiographers. At least, though, we will have learned that self and history are bound together, and solipsism is a grand illusion. We will, I trust, never confuse isolation with self-created, autonomous worlds again. We will not mistake a displacement of self as an aesthetic or political triumph. We can, at least, tell our history of history as truthfully as possible.

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Some Approaches to Life

CHARLES THOMAS SAMUELS

The cupboard might as well have been bare. Shopping around for movies in August (deadline time), I found mostly stale goods on display: violence, Bonded or karate-chopped; porn harvested before the anticipated storm of injunctions; "black-oriented" porn and violence, as indistinguishable from one another as loaves of bread; old Hollywood pastries freshened up with racy quips; revivals. Interest therefore quickened at the appearance of films by brand-new directors (Arthur Barron's *Jeremy,* James William Guercio's *Electra Glide in Blue*) and by promising newcomers (Aram Avakian, adapter of John Barth's *End of the Road,* has returned with *Cops and Robbers;* George Lucas, who made *THX 1138,* now offers *American Graffiti*). Moreover, since all are based on scripts written directly for the screen, one entered the theater guaranteed a minimum of originality. Unfortunately, only *American Graffiti* rises much above that minimum level, but each of the others contains a few moments of fresh contact with life.

Notoriously, our movies have long been dedicated to escaping such contact. The rare American film with realistic intentions is usually artificial in style. (Nothing so sums up the Hollywood mentality in this regard as Selznick's willingness to finance De Sica's study of poverty, *The Bicycle Thief,* on condition that Cary Grant play the central role.) During the sixties, greater verisimilitude began to appear on our screens. John Cassavetes' works attempted a version of Italian neorealism; we had *Easy Rider;* and even genre films, like *Bonnie and Clyde,* refurbished old formulas through greater credibility of detail. In part at least, each of the new films attempts this greater authenticity.

All are shot on location, thereby encouraging an interplay between place and behavior. To emphasize milieu and a sense of kinship with the characters, all employ nonstar and sometimes nonprofessional actors. Finally, they structure their narratives, for the most part, in natural vignettes.

Ultimately just another heist film, *Cops and Robbers* only flirts with these techniques, but they make it more credible and biting than most films of this type. During the credit sequence, one of the heroes exploits his cop's uniform to hold up a liquor store. Thereafter, as we watch him and other associates in their daily routine, the vignettes document temptations and irritants that drive policemen to crime.

But what begins as social satire eventually turns into a denial of moral distinctions that permits wholehearted rooting for the heroes. The film's second half is an adventure in which two cops fail to steal some corporate bearer bonds but nonetheless bilk their mobster employers out of a designated commission. The top Mafiosi pay with their lives for having been taken in, as we learn from the final shots that show a funeral wreath imprinted with their names and the plane that speeds the heroes off to their ill-gotten reward. Extorting a laugh at successful bravado, this ending evades the problem of urban corruption that had been so convincingly portrayed. As a result, Donald Westlake's script and Avakian's direction seem facilely clever in capturing a lawless social order

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only to validate a caper formula.

Another film about cops, *Electra Glide,* is also rather documentary at the beginning. With frames so constricted that we never see the event but only its components, the film begins by photographing a suicide: a gun being loaded, some pork chops frying in a pan, a phonograph playing and then ceasing after the explosion. From this we move to equally constricted images revealing the hero as he wakes up next to his girl friend and then prepares for work. The credits now come up as freeze frames while he is putting on his motorcycle cop's uniform. Then *Electra Glide* avoids any plotting for more than half an hour, during which it offers a series of episodes that characterize John Wintergreen.

Details in the precredit sequence suggest that Wintergreen is a stud and a health-nut, a superpatriot, a cop reveling in his leather and buckles. Subsequent scenes achieve a lifelike complication of this view. He tickets a speeding car even after learning that the driver is a big-shot detective who will retaliate, lectures a whining veteran not to expect special treatment, refuses to participate when his bigoted sidekick plants grass on a hippie whose camper-bus they stop. Bawdy with his mistress, Wintergreen is charmingly innocent when he meets some nubile girls. Anxious to move up in the world and become a "glamour-boy detective," he nonetheless attempts to be fair in his dealings with the powerless.

So long as the film is content to build up this picture of a man caught between moderation and the love of display, *Electra Glide* is honestly affecting. But when the plot takes over, so does falsity.

The apparent suicide turns out to have been a murder, perpetrated by a senile man who didn't like seeing his old friend consort with hippies. Hippies are no more popular with the detective on the case, an impotent megalomaniac, who gets kicks from beating longhairs and rants about their plan for "systematic police genocide." Because the detective is blinded by prejudices, Wintergreen steps in and solves the crime, losing in the process any desire to become part of an establishment he has come to regard as "full of shit." In the final scene, he attempts a sort of penance for his colleagues' sins by releasing the hippie whose camper-bus he once again chances to stop. But this time the hippie *is* running drugs, although the preoccupied Wintergreen doesn't fathom the cause of the man's nervousness. When he follows the bus so as to return the license inadvertently left behind by the hippie, he is thought to be onto the crime and is gunned down for his pains. Wintergreen isn't simply a good cop with believable problems; he is a casualty in the well-known battle between the generations.

Stretching for parable, Robert Boris's script betrays the precise realism of its first half hour and buries an interesting character in clichés and contrivance. Bad enough to have the detective turn out to be a steer despite his bullishness; worse to learn this from the girl who sleeps with both him and Wintergreen (in such a small town, how did she deceive both?); worse still to stage the revelation as the sort of drunken confessional scene that Claire Trevor used to play in Warner Brothers melodramas. The ending, which reverses that of *Easy Rider,* is false for being contrived and for asking us to take tragically what is only an accident.

This effect of phony portentousness is exacerbated by Guercio's slow backtrack from Wintergreen's body (another echo of *Easy Rider*) and by the song he has written for performance during the film's last seven minutes (sample lyrics: "God above is there not anything / That we might do / To try to make this world of ours / A better place for me and you"). "Just when you think that *Electra Glide in Blue* is over," the advertisements alert us, "it isn't." Too bad.

Avakian's film is also harmed by a discursive song, in this case played continuously ("It's a world of cops and robbers . . . that's all right"). Both songs contradict verisimilitude while catering to an audience less concerned with the message contained in the lyrics than with a pleasant tune and the chance to purchase "hit singles."

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The photography of both films is sometimes purposefully realistic and at others only titillating. Occasionally, as in an aerial zoom shot that takes us into the heroes' Long Island apartment complex, Avakian directs his cameraman to reveal a wealth of social detail: here, the oppressiveness of a suburban rabbit warren, where jets and smog hang over the communal swimming pool, breeding dreams of escape. Elsewhere, to no descriptive end, the camera tracks and zooms like a trapeze artist in search of applause. *Electra Glide in Blue* is even more flamboyant. Both after the credits and during the song, we are treated to long time-lapse shots of Monument Valley; throughout, vehicles don't appear without churning up photogenic clouds of dust; a two-minute rock concert and the arrival of a squad car both become displays of whirling colored lights; and old men's faces are set hovering in a cloud of cigarette smoke for a striking image that has no connection to the scene that follows. Conrad Hall, the cinematographer, displays a virtuosity that overwhelms the film's content.

Such flashy photography, the commentative songs, and a replacement of episodic accuracy by narrative contrivance all express a failure of faith in the eloquence of detail. *Jeremy* partakes in the same failure, even more deplorably than the other films because, being slighter in subject, it depends on detail.

A high school sophomore meets and falls for a girl in an upper grade and, after delays in approaching her, brings his romance to consummation. Immediately thereafter, the girl's father has to move back to Detroit from New York, so the young lovers must tearfully part.

Some of this slight story is convincingly developed, notably in scenes before the kids fall in love, like the much-admired moment when Jeremy calls Susan after first preparing a list of topics for discussion. Elsewhere Barron's script sacrifices plausibility to effect. When Jeremy accidentally spies Susan through the open door of a dance studio, the real high school setting and natural performances don't quite hide the underlying cliché of love at first sight. Then, having made his couple meet conventionally, Barron also makes them "meet cute." Although we had been told that Jeremy was an A student in every course but history, when the boy wrongly identifies Susan's exercise as a plié and she wonders at his mistake, he explains, "It's the only dance what [*sic*] I know."

In both the consummation scene and the ending, Barron destroys credibility by inflating events with another song ("I have the *New York Times* / And explanations of / The most profound nursery rhymes. . . . Before the rivers run dry. . . . Let's be kind to one another. . . . Don't throw your love about," et cetera). And like the other directors, he often photographs his subject too dramatically. When the kids walk through the city, for example, sewers belch steam, fountains soar, and sun spots create dazzling haloes.

American Graffiti also contains striking photography and commentative songs, but it submits these and all other devices to a goal of rigorous fidelity. Remarkable in itself, it is even more so when compared to the other movies.

As the title indicates, *American Graffiti* is a series of jottings. On a night before two of them are due to fly East for their freshman year in college, four young men make the teen scene of a provincial California town (Modesto). Curt wonders whether he ought to go away, temporarily reconciles himself to a cast-off, homely girl friend, but, after being signaled to by a beautiful blonde in a white Thunderbird, spends the rest of the night trying to track her down. Steve, his prospective schoolmate and sister's sweetheart, attempts to convince Laurie that they should each date others while he is away and spends the night trying to assuage her resulting anger. John, a poorer friend limited to adventure at home, inadvertently picks up a thirteen-year-old girl while cruising about in his hot rod and uses his time trying to dump her. Toad, the group's clown, finds a teenage vamp who involves him in a comic series of mishaps.

Half of the film's pleasure comes from the accuracy with which these minor adventures are portrayed; the teenagers' argot, their cars, clothes and fixations are all

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scrupulously reproduced. Equally impressive is the ease with which their adventures are combined. Under the auspices of the most ingenious sound track I can remember in an American film, *Graffiti* cuts back and forth among the characters, all of whom are listening to the same disc jockey on their car radios. This coincidence —perfectly plausible in the world depicted —allows Lucas to move about, distill and elide almost imperceptibly. As a result, the film, although crowded with characters, events and bits of business, is swifter and more unified than so scrappy a structure would seem to allow. Moreover, Lucas has selected and combined the songs into a continuous commentary on the action, without the slightest sacrifice of credibility. For example, we hear "Rock Around the Clock" under the credits; when Laurie and Steve are forced to display togetherness at a "sock hop," the band plays "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes"; "Earth Angel" blares from a drive-in loudspeaker when Toad arrives there with his kewpie doll; Curt tries to kill spare moments by watching television, as the radio plays "Great Pretender," switching to "Ain't That a Shame" when he is abducted by a street gang—and so on. Songs in the other films inflated meaning and violated realism; those in *American Graffiti* are essential parts of a way of life.

The photography is also more pertinent than that in the other works, although it is equally flamboyant. Avakian's and Barron's cameras call attention to their own movement, and Conrad Hall's effects are preening. With Haskell Wexler as "visual consultant," Ron Eveslage and Jan D'Alquen restlessly follow the motion of constantly cruising cars in a false day of garish streetlights. Insofar as *American Graffiti* is commenting on a life-style, it does so precisely by creating an aura of frenetic mobility and dazzlement that is obviously more exciting than what occurs.

But this discrepancy between physical activity and inner stasis isn't carefully worked out. Critics are wrong to call the film nostalgic, but it is hardly censorious. Rather it shows teen culture of a certain time and place without evincing any definite attitude. Even when depicting its more interesting characters, the film is superficial.

Curt is undergoing a crisis, since he fears going away to college, but the film gives us little insight into why his crisis is resolved. Midway in the action, he converses with a teacher, who had gone East but quickly returned, and Curt witnesses the extent of the man's reversion to childhood by means of the arrival of a schoolgirl with whom the teacher is apparently having an affair. Presumably, his later involvement with the street gang and his pursuit of the blonde also make their contributions: one, by showing that he can handle a difficult situation; the other, with its hint of adult adventure. But in neither case do we see the effect on Curt. His departure seems more dependent on his final meeting with the disc jockey, who tells the boy that he would leave Modesto if he were young enough to make the break. Overexplicit and contrived, this simply evades the question of what is taking place inside Curt.

John's characterization also shows that the film is unwilling to probe beneath the surface. Arguably the most interesting of the boys, John half resents, half envies the opportunity granted to Steve and Curt, but his basic decency makes him urge their departure. Although he bears a hood's insignias—the ducktail haircut, a pack of cigarettes in the sleeve of a T-shirt rolled up to reveal his biceps, ostentatious *machismo* with girls and cars—John is sensitive and selfless. He will go no further in expressing jealousy at the airport when Curt leaves than by cuffing him just a bit too hard for friendship and by calling Curt a "punk."

With Carol, the girl he picks up, John once more reveals his sensitivity. Her age threatens his reputation as a lady-killer, but when he succeeds in forcing her out of the car, her despondency makes him take her back. His behavior with the girl (of whom he finally rids himself by frightening her with feigned lust) is amusing, but it doesn't take us deeper into a personality already revealed through his contact with the young men. He remains at the level of a background figure, about whom—pi-

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quantly—there is more than meets the eye; but how he came to have such delicate sentiments or why he is able to cope so well with his regrets and disappointments are questions the film declines to answer.

Lucas's energies are devoted to constructing a mosaic, not to making the pieces comprehensible. We admire the craftsmanship with which everything is made to fit, but a finer artist could have done more.

How much more, one can see by recalling a film that may not actually have influenced *American Graffiti* but is nonetheless so close as to provide a touchstone. Like Lucas's film, Fellini's *I vitelloni* is an episodic study of provincial adolescence, focusing on four male friends, one of whom brings the action to a climax by leaving town. But, unlike Lucas, Fellini includes glimpses of an entire community, thereby placing the protagonists in explanatory perspective, and he implies a view of adolescence by showing its effects on men who are adolescents in spirit and not merely in age.

Fellini's details are equally funny and credible, but unlike Lucas's, they always reflect psychology as well as mores. A good example is the sequence in which the aspiring playwright among the *vitelloni* drags his pals to watch the performance of a dead-beat actor who had promised to read Leopoldo's play. Although Fellini means us to enjoy the show in itself as a farrago of burlesque and sentimentalism wholly typical of provincial theaters, he also designs the scene so as to illustrate the self-deception of an uncritical Leopoldo. In *American Graffiti,* even when events grow out of the characters, they don't illuminate them. When Toad, being challenged to a drag race at a stoplight, accidentally crashes by throwing his car into reverse; when Carol threatens to tell a policeman that she'll say John's trying to rape her; when Curt is forced to front for the street gang as it robs a friend's store, the event is only a gag, a comic filling out of a loose narrative structure. Never losing its brilliance as a social panorama, *American Graffiti* provides no insight into what more and more comes to resemble a revue.

In *I vitelloni,* Moraldo's decision to leave town results directly from disillusionment with his sister's husband, a model of provincial manhood whom he had deeply admired but now sees to be trivial and immature. In *American Graffiti,* the link between Curt and Steve through Laurie only facilitates a fluency in narrative transition, and Curt's decision to leave does not, like Moraldo's, proceed from any deepening of insight into the life he rejects. In *I vitelloni* Moraldo is also helped to put adolescence behind by a chance meeting with an outsider, but the little railroad boy who has precociously entered the ranks of labor is clearly a negative contrast to the lazy parasitism of Moraldo's friends. The attractive blonde Curt had been pursuing throughout *American Graffiti* is designed to play a similar role, but because she is more redolent of California than the East she doesn't embody a precise alternative, and Lucas is being simply assertive when he has Curt see her from his departing plane driving in the same direction. Curt's departure ends the film, but it is in no other sense a conclusion. Early on, Steve tells him "you can't stay seventeen forever," a truism that accurately sums up all that *American Graffiti* tells us.

Yet Lucas seems to be discomforted by this obvious limitation, so at the end he imposes a series of titles that report what eventually became of the characters. This achieves a wan irony (John is killed in a traffic accident, Toad is reported missing in Vietnam, Steve becomes an insurance agent in Modesto, and Curt a writer in Canada), but it reminds us that their lives were so narrowly represented in the film.

Nonetheless, *American Graffiti* reconstructs a moment in our culture with more accuracy and skill than one finds in most of our movies. Perhaps its narrowness is even a precondition of that accuracy, for the world it chooses to recreate is heedless in motion and deficient in self-awareness. By sinking itself so fully in that shallow world, it triumphs over the other films because they dip their toes in life only to draw back on the dry ground of convention. But *American Graffiti* splashes about brilliantly in what *I vitelloni* fathoms.

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The Revolving Bookstand . . . . . .

Ecology and Survival

HENRY BEETLE HOUGH

ONLY ONE EARTH. The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet. *By Barbara Ward and René Dubos. Norton. $6.*
A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF CONSERVATION IN AMERICA. *Edited by Robert McHenry with Charles Van Doren. Praeger. $13.50.*
MUST THE SEAS DIE? *By Colin Moorcraft. Gambit. $6.95.*
AMERICA THE VANISHING: RURAL LIFE AND THE PRICE OF PROGRESS. *Edited by Samuel R. Ogden. Stephen Greene Press. $6.95.*
THE CLOSING CIRCLE. *By Barry Commoner. Knopf. $6.95.*
THE POLITICS OF ECOLOGY. *By James Ridgeway. Dutton. Paper, $1.75.*

It seems no great while ago, although I suppose thirty years may have passed, that I happened to be in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, when an upsurge in the demand for coke had led to the relighting of beehive ovens, relics of an outdated technological age. A pall of sulfurous gas and smoke lay over city and countryside. To my comment on this appalling scene, an obviously up-and-coming young man in the most important bank rejoined, "Yes, but we're not as dirty as we'd like to be."

The more dirt, the more money. So it was that the environmental crisis had its beginnings long, long ago. Those first builders of factories and diggers of mines lessened their risks and costs by using air, earth and water for the discharge of wastes. Why not? The "natural systems" were free, and the Industrial Revolution ran all for profit without kindness.

Technology and industry have continued to degrade the natural world increasingly, and, since World War II, with a new kind of assault. "Productive technologies with intense impacts on the environment have displaced less destructive ones," Barry Commoner points out. Human beings pollute the environment "because they have broken out of the closed, cyclical network in which all other living things are held." The result is the environmental crisis, and the crisis is one of survival.

Those who write about ecology today are in no disagreement. They have come after the conservationists who, back around 1912, followed either Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot in advocating wise uses of natural resources and protecting the public interest, or John Muir and John Burroughs in speaking for wild beauty and the life of the open lands. Public attention then was caught mostly by single issues such as the use of egret feathers on women's hats, or the construction of a dam in the Yosemite Valley. "Ecology" as a meaningful word has only recently come alive, and "ecosphere" and "ecosystem" are newer still. "Ecocatastrophe" dates only from 1969.

Survival, now the theme, is a challenge

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of the very minute, and in all of these writings the searing atomic flame becomes the greatest dread, although the world may very well be done in through less spectacular, everyday error.

In *Only One Earth* Barbara Ward and René Dubos give a whole account, patiently and engrossingly clear, of man's experience with himself and his surroundings since the first streams were poisoned—only a little then—and the first slag heaps piled beside gentle villages, not yet high enough to slide off upon the houses. They speculate usefully upon the future of developed and developing nations, and deal also with the management of a social order in the event of man's survival, and with his chances in unnaturally huddled cities.

Their viewpoint is global. Increasing emission of carbon dioxide and dust, soot and gas, may affect the precise and delicate balance of surface temperature on earth to bring about either a new ice age or a total melting of polar ice caps, in either case a planetary disaster. The ocean, and there is only one, receives a "toxic influx of global range." But the natural resource "most threatened with pollution, most exposed to degradation, most liable to irreversible damage" is man himself.

The "if" is anxiously insistent. "If all man can offer to the decades ahead is the same combination of scientific drive, economic cupidity, and national arrogance, then we cannot rate very highly the chance of reaching the year 2,000 with our planet still functioning safely and our humanity preserved."

Barry Commoner narrows the margin a little, suggesting a grace period of twenty-five years before "serious large-scale catastrophes overtake us." *A Documentary History of Conservation in America* quotes his testimony before a Senate committee: "if we continue in our reckless way to destroy the living systems that support us . . . this planet will before long become an unsuitable place for human habitation." The familiar neighborhood phrase "before long" may be the scariest prediction of all.

A Documentary History provides a sort of symphonic accompaniment to the sweep and narrative of *Only One Earth,* its movements chosen from a time of simple delight in the wilderness—Columbus, Emerson, William Bartram, John Muir, Thoreau (more wryly) and many others—through the period of early doubting and more sophisticated awareness—John Stuart Mill, Malthus, and again many others—until one hears the voices of Stuart Chase, Fairfield Osborn, Rachel Carson, Lewis Mumford and the worrying moderns. The final section, "Paradise and Apocalypse," offers a choice of "The New Garden" or "The New Wilderness," bearing upon man's fateful choices. The pessimists are more up to date and factual.

Samuel R. Ogden's *America the Vanishing* was to have been a bucolic collection but fell into a polemical pattern as he discovered "the signs of what E. B. White calls 'a dim degeneracy of progress'." It remained only to bracket his anthology between the prologue and epilogue of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus.*

The editors of *A Documentary History* prefer as their climax Aldo Leopold on "The Land Ethic": "Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community." Yet they close with Paul R. Ehrlich's forecast—death of the ocean in 1979—and Mark Van Doren's brief poem, "so fair a world it was."

Ehrlich, chemist and scientist at large as he may be, sounds too strident, yet there remains a baleful plausibility in his projection of sudden deadly "blooms" of previously unknown diatoms. Colin Moorcraft records that the first "red tide," an explosion or "bloom" in the population of certain red species of phyloplankton, occurred off the Florida Gulf Coast in 1916, then none until 1932, another in 1948, 1952, 1953 and 1954, and since 1957 no year has passed without this morbid visitation.

Ehrlich projects a final critical interference by DDT residues with photosynthesis in the ocean, which produces a quarter of

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all the oxygen that we breathe. Moorcraft writes that "plankton have been found to be very heavily contaminated and the population of plankton seems to be falling dangerously." No one knows enough yet to prove the guilt of DDT, but evidence becomes more and more convincing. In September, 1973, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution announced an expedition to study such effects, and Moorcraft hopes that "the scientific community will arrive at a firm conclusion before it is too late."

There is always oil, the black death, three times as much of it in the Sargasso Sea as there is Sargasso weed; there are radioactive wastes and other wastes exciting overfertility or overkill. "The natural controls which have kept the composition of sea water constant for hundreds of millions of years have been upset by a sudden massive input of heavy metals such as lead." And Moorcraft describes the concentration of metallic poisons in marine creatures through the uncanny, capricious action of synergism.

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Los Angeles air is not so simple as popular talk of "smog" makes it appear. Improvement of agriculture in Illinois through the use of more and more fertilizer leads to water pollution and bad luck for mankind's health. Accumulated wastes in Lake Erie cause a demand for oxygen so enormous as to approach disaster, irretrievably changing the biological nature of the lake —and worse may come. "In some future especially hot and windless summer, Lake Erie may be faced with a sudden demand to repay a century's accumulated oxygen debt," the ultimate catastrophe.

The mass of pollutants at the bottom is so great that no solution for Lake Erie can be imagined, but continued pollution of *all surface waters must be checked to fore*stall a breakdown of "the natural separation of man and animals from soil pathogens" with disease and toxic hazards that "may in the future become an intolerable threat to human health. And in this case the future is something like the next thirty years."

What man has been doing wrong is clear enough in some cases and less clear in others. He has ignored the "intractable limits of the natural sector" of all those interdependent processes upon which life relies. He has developed a fragmented technology upon the base of a fragmented science, losing at this critical time his opportunity to grasp the whole. He has been almost purposely ignorant of the thin and fragile nature of his only habitat, the ecosphere, and of its precise and delicate balances surrounding and sustaining him. In splitting the atom he has found a "power of a scale and intensity that begin to match that of the global scale in which we live" yet has regarded this complacently as if it were wholly to his advantage.

He has learned to accomplish all sorts of technological marvels without following through the chain of consequences. He has proved to the eleventh hour of disaster not only that a little knowledge may be a dangerous thing, but that an immense amount of knowledge may still be too little.

Commoner gives the terms of a solution common to the insights of all these writers: "If we would survive and preserve both our natural heritage and our own humanity, we must at last discover how to solve, by social means, the social evils that threaten both." For the stress upon ecosystems is from the outside, imposed by man, and social, not biological, pressures have brought us to the place where we are. The way ahead does not look easy, since the ecological crisis invites an economic crisis as well.

If "it is concluded that the private enterprise system *must* continue to grow, while its ecological base will not tolerate unlimited expansion, then there is a serious incompatibility between the two," and it is private enterprise that must be rebuilt and made ecologically viable.

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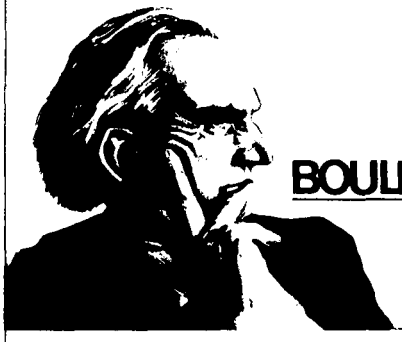

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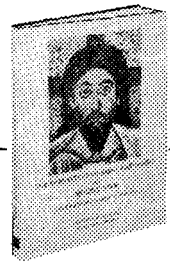

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struction is put by Commoner at about $40 billion annually through the next twenty-five years. As if the problem were not huge enough as a matter of economics, James Ridgeway in his book, *The Politics of Ecology,* gives a history of political shenanigans—evasions, failures and high-sounding legislation tapering off in dilution or obstruction. Politics, so far, has treated ecology craftily, respecting its importance in public relations but not yielding much in business-as-usual.

Ridgeway finds, even "at the heart of the ecology movement . . . the pollution control industry," the polluters finding a ready market for control devices or systems, thereby prospering twice over. But there is competition from enterprises that calm the fears of a community without too much interference with business growth.

As he looked around in 1970, Ridgeway found the ecology movement remote and cut off from "the war, political repression, blacks, the poor, or any other factor which created the currents of stress in our society" and his summation defines a point of view not persuasive to all who accept his main thesis: "At last, 'pollution control', 'ecology', 'environmental quality', whatever slogan it went by, were . . . plans for advancing capitalism."

His defeatism must have faltered, though, and he must have been excited by "the defeat of the S.S.T. over the massive, persistent opposition of the Nixon administration, the aircraft industry, and a number of labor unions," a defeat "recognized as a crucial turning point in environmental politics." These are Commoner's words. In a pinch, the same sort of scientists who were wrong about the Van Allen radiation belts could not be believed when they shrugged off the notion of danger to the ozone layer that makes earthly existence possible.

Clearly, it is the increasingly effective ecological organizations that must be relied upon if the environmental crisis is to be met with success. Scientists and technologists have solitary voices and no common ground of responsibility even when they are in agreement. Industry will not voluntarily pay tremendous sums that add no value to its products and bear most heavily, although most justly, on the proudly lucrative enterprises marketing the fruits of the new technology. Business is unlikely to forego profits merely on a showing of planetary peril. Politicians read their mail and are influenced accordingly, but the mail must be inspired, informed, directed to timeliness, relevance and fact by the environmental crusaders—Friends of the Earth, Environmental Defense Council, League of Conservation Voters, Sierra Club, the Audubon societies—and by the collaborating efforts of many small regional or community groups.

The efforts of these organizations have grown in depth and range. They rely not only upon opposition but are innovative and constructive. The Massachusetts Audubon Society, aware of the implications of the "energy crisis," is even pioneering in work toward the practical application of solar heat.

Ward and Dubos pose this challenge: "Today, in human society, we can perhaps hope to survive in all our prized diversity provided we can achieve an ultimate loyalty to our single, beautiful, and vulnerable planet, Earth." Moorcraft looks toward "a healthy lovingly harvested sea," seeing hope in mankind's "deep strand of mysterious attachment to the waters of the ocean." Commoner sets a related goal: "Since the environmental crisis is the result of social mismanagement of the world's resources, then it can be resolved and man can survive in a human condition when the social organization of man is brought into harmony with the ecosphere." Ridgeway's phrase is "fundamental idea of community." The editors of *A Documentary History* urge the sharing as widely as possible of "an awareness of the living world."

"Loyalty," "love," "harmony," "community," "sharing"—these are words of an aspiration that sometimes appears as distant as the stars, but here they come into focus in the immediacy of an objective urgent for all humanity if the planet is to be kept intact and inhabitable.

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Confrontations with Nothingness

SIX EXISTENTIAL HEROES: THE POLITICS OF FAITH. *By Lucio P. Ruotolo. Harvard University Press. $8.*

Reviewed by PETER J. CONN

Six Existential Heroes starts from the premise that "the experience of nothingness animates almost every aspect of existential literature." Unspoken behind that premise lurks a prior one—that almost all modern literature is somehow or other existential. In the dialectic between the experience of nothingness, which emerges out of the encounter with universal contingency, and the impulse toward the affirmation of historical existence, lies the pervasive modern tension that Professor Lucio Ruotolo perceives as informing the literature that he sets out to explore.

Emphasizing a somewhat gratuitous distinction between existential authenticity and what he calls "romantic self-indulgence," Ruotolo directs us to consider six fictional characters, each of whom has been "led beyond self-worship toward a continually expanding vision of self and of world." The path that each of the six follows—some more instinctively, some more self-consciously—is from that primal and ultimately creative confrontation with "nothing," toward "something evermore about to be." Nothingness is seen, then, not only as more than an abstraction, but as catalytic.

Ruotolo has chosen as his six representative figures Clarissa Dalloway, Rose Wilson in *Brighton Rock,* Isaac McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses,* the "Invisible Man," Ralph in *Lord of the Flies,* and Yakov Bok in *The Fixer.* Each of these characters is analyzed in a single chapter, and in each chapter Ruotolo also tries with a varying emphasis to relate the novel under discussion to the rest of that author's work.

Before considering Ruotolo's analyses, it might be instructive, if not actually disconcerting, to ponder the fictional choices he has made. In half the instances, the book and character glossed are not generally regarded as among the given author's major creations. More broadly, while all of these novels are fine and interesting, practically none of them can be placed with any certainty among the major fictional statements of twentieth-century English and American literature. No Joyce, Conrad, Hemingway, Fitzgerald. No Henry James, whose Milly Theale not only qualifies chronologically but, to the point, begins from one of the most devastating perceptions of annihilation in modern fiction, and heroically shapes from that a momentous if finally ambiguous affirmation. No D. H. Lawrence, although Paul Morel in the last few pages of *Sons and Lovers* undergoes an experience that, in its language and import, is astonishingly close to the existential "event" that Ruotolo has set out to trace: "Always alone, his soul oscillated, first on the side of death, then on the side of life, doggedly. The real agony was that he had nowhere to go, nothing to do, nothing to say, and *was* nothing himself. Sometimes he ran down the streets as if he were mad; sometimes he was mad; things weren't there, things were there."

I have two reasons for suggesting the most evident sorts of omissions in this book's fictional scope, neither of which is merely to scold Professor Ruotolo for not writing the book he didn't choose to write. The pertinence of this objection, in the first place, is only in proportion to the size of the claims made by Ruotolo's thesis. Since he announces that these six novels, "presented in chronological order, typify those changes in historical consciousness that have effected the treatment of existential heroism," it is evident that his claims are very large indeed; in fact sufficiently large that they deserve to be tested against the largest available instances. Whether Yakov Bok learns to believe that there are ways to reverse history, or Ralph achieves a "sad maturity," is probably less im-

✪ PETER J. CONN is associate professor of English and associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania. His two main research areas are modern fiction and American puritanism.

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Woman is a pitfall — a pitfall, a hole, a ditch.

ANONYMOUS MESOPOTAMIAN POET

Women are almost all timid by nature, soft, slow,
and therefore more useful when they sit still and watch over our things.

LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI, Fifteenth Century

Woman is naturally subject to man,
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portant to any major recapitulation of twentieth-century literary history than are the discoveries and choices of characters on the scale of Milly Theale and Paul Morel. And this in turn suggests my second point here. Since Paul's affirmation is provisional, as Milly's is to some extent ironic —since, to use an author discussed by Ruotolo, Thomas Sutpen would surely have presented a more fitting but more problematic test than Isaac McCaslin—the unfortunate impression intrudes that the great and "difficult" cases have been avoided.

At the very least, Ruotolo's decisions indicate his subordination of fictional praxis to thesis. Ruotolo practically admits this when he introduces his chapter on Faulkner by observing that this novelist's work after 1939 "answers the French existentialist's [Sartre's] chief objection." There is no reason to suppose, however, that Faulkner himself, when he was writing *Go Down, Moses,* was even aware of Sartre's assorted praise and blame. Thus the lesser productions of a great novelist "answer" Sartre mainly because Professor Ruotolo has rather arbitrarily told them to.

This sort of manipulation goes on all the time in this book. When Virginia Woolf wrote that she aimed "to see human beings freely and quickly," she did so, according to Ruotolo, "as if to stress that her aim is phenomenological rather than impressionistic." It may be. But it may also be that the terminological mediation imported by Professor Ruotolo obscures rather than illuminates Mrs. Woolf's splendidly straightforward summation of her own objectives.

This brings me to what are obviously the more serious problems raised by this book. The texts that he has chosen, along with Ruotolo's sometimes proprietary attitude toward them, are limitations; but they might have been surmounted by an authoritative analytic method. This, unfortunately, doesn't happen. The method consists primarily in the application of a variety of modern philosophical writers to the fiction under review. The extraliterary bibliography upon which Ruotolo draws is formidable: his scope here is well-nigh magisterial. Freud, Tillich, Kierkegaard, Sartre and above all Heidegger are called upon in support of the book's argument. Yet while Ruotolo's suggestions are often wonderfully provocative, the vital connection between the array of existential and phenomenological theory and the job of practical criticism is, alas, often conspicuously absent.

The results indeed are sometimes downright ironic. For example, a few paragraphs after insisting on his own rejection of those abstractions that, according to Heidegger and others, tempt us to deny our experiential being in time, Ruotolo quotes at length from "Porphyria's Lover" in order to say that God's silence at the end of this poem "may reveal more than the narrator's inability to take responsibility for his murder of Being and time." This sort of talk may get Ruotolo somewhere, but it doesn't do much for Browning. Further, when Ruotolo adds that this poem's demoniac lover expresses "bad faith," the confusion is typically compounded. Ruotolo doesn't say what he means by "bad faith." A few pages earlier, he has been discussing Sartre; yet Browning's narrator, whatever he may express, certainly does not express Sartre's *mauvais foi.* But by using the term in this context, by exploiting an apparent but finally insubstantial allusion, Ruotolo creates an atmosphere of authority and documentation that, too often, amounts to less than meets the eye. Although not so intended, Ruotolo's rhetorical strategy consists too frequently of these final evasions.

To this general strategy may perhaps be attributed the fact that in this book so many things are "like" so many others. Peter Walsh is like the young Stephen Dedalus; Septimus Smith is like King Lear in the wilderness or Sartre's prisoner in "The Wall," while Smith's visionary scribblings "recall" Wordsworth; Hale, Pinkie and Ida are like the three characters in Sartre's *No Exit;* McCaslin is like Meursault, and so on. Some of these likenesses are simply opportune; some are inspired: "Like *Mrs. Dalloway, Brighton Rock* is more than incidentally concerned with perception";

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and some are just wrong: Pinkie is *not* like the lieutenant in *The Power and the Glory,* at least not in any sense that would propel Ruotolo's argument.

Much of this methodological problem, the characteristic distance in Ruotolo's land of likeness between philosophical dicta and a realized critical activity, is epitomized in the following typical passage: "As in the work of Virginia Woolf, Faulkner's effort to trace Western history to its 'bottom' resembles the efforts of philosophers like Husserl and Heidegger to seek our historical starting point." It isn't just that it is hard to see where to go next with this. Nor is it only that the statement is internally incomprehensible (with the publication of *Sein und Zeit,* Heidegger is no longer "like" Husserl at all). The real difficulty is that such a statement, after any amount of scrutiny, is simply not quite "there." Its primary effect is to call attention to itself. Beyond that, if it points in any direction at all, that direction is more or less away from the achieved worlds of the novels and vaguely toward the world of conceptual and verbal abstraction.

Potentially, Ruotolo's subject is an important one. Heidegger's insights into time and history, into the nature of authentic and inauthentic forms of human existence, should have much to offer us as we grope toward understanding the individual confrontations with nothingness that Professor Ruotolo has rightly seen marking so much of our literature. And surely the correspondences he delineates are at last more than merely verbal. But it is not enough simply to impose ideas upon our fictional landscape. Heidegger, particularly, presents acute problems in such an endeavor. For, despite his own assertions, especially after *Sein und Zeit,* that authentic existence is "poetic" in some way, there is at best a vexed relationship between Heidegger's categorical insights and life as it is actually experienced in the contradictions of its particularity. "The worst part," Thomas Langan too baldly but usefully complains about the Heideggerian existent, is that "he has no personal reality" *(The Meaning of Heidegger).* And even William Barrett, an author upon whom Ruotolo depends, raises the same sort of dissent (in *Irrational Man).* The literary critic, then, must adapt and interpret, and not simply "apply" Heidegger, or any other ideological system. The perception of literature from the vantage point of any encompassing and organizing theme always risks reduction and thereby threatens the integrity of the literature itself. *Six Existential Heroes,* although it is stimulating and original in many of its parts, taken as a whole pointedly illustrates those risks.

The Frontier of Modernism

THE NEW YORK SCHOOL: A CULTURAL RECKONING. *By Dore Ashton. Viking. $10.*

Reviewed by BLANCHE GELFANT

"Painters must speak through paint," Hans Hofmann told his students, "not through words." But art critics and historians have only words; and their words take shape inevitably as narration. Writing about art, the critic tells a story with a beginning, middle and end. The story may be about a single painter or a group, a particular work or a tradition, an arrested moment of art history or a trend. However factual the story seems, it is a fiction; and it has the power of fiction to evoke and recreate images. The best stories are the most evocative, suggesting through words the images that speak through paint, the only language, as Hofmann said, of the artist. Although abstract expressionists valued "pure" paint, they remained, as Philip Guston stated, "image-makers and image-ridden." He was reiterating Adolph Gottlieb's earlier definition of artist as "image-maker." It is a common enough

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definition (although abstract expressionism is often considered imageless). It seems to imply that art appreciation is an unmediated act that requires us only to look at the image conceived and expressed in paint. But we know that we depend upon words to mediate that image; words make us *see* —immediately, perceptively and with excitement. Our insight into modern American art has been heightened, if not formed, by the words of such critic-historians as Thomas Hess, Sam Hunter, Harold Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, B. H. Friedman, Barbara Rose, Robert Goldwater, Irving Sandler, Lawrence Alloway, Meyer Shapiro. The roll call is incomplete and could not be completed without the name of Dore Ashton. Her reputation rests securely upon essays and books on modern painting that have helped establish a way of seeing—and seeing into—the visual image. Her lesser-known monograph on Philip Guston seems to me particularly admirable as a resonating verbal evocation of a painter's mystical and fluid, and *almost* elusive, images. Her latest book, *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning,* takes us back to the prodigious painters of the forties and fifties who came to be identified because of their association with each other and New York as the New York school. They are known also more dramatically as action painters or abstract expressionists—to name some: Pollock, Gorky, Hofmann, de Kooning, Baziotes, Rothko, Gottlieb, Newman, Motherwell, Reinhardt, Kline. They were striking painters and personalities, and their lives had all the elements of drama—struggle, dedication, tragedy and transcendence. If Miss Ashton's book about them is disappointingly dull, it is, I believe, because she has failed to find the narrative form to contain them. She wants to write "not about art [she says], nor about artists individually, but about artists in American society." Society, however, is a nebulous subject that defies narrative form because it is formless: it lacks beginning or end to give it structure; it lacks definition to give it shape, a center to give it focus.

In concentrating on society, Miss Ashton moves beyond formalistic art criticism to cultural history, a move that could be promising and adventuresome, but also hazardous. As history, *The New York School* reviews familiar events of American life from 1920 to 1960. They are almost too familiar to mention: the political witchhunts of the twenties; the depression of the thirties; the struggle against fascism of the forties; and the prosperity and complacency of the fifties. This span is arbitrary for a book about painters associated mainly with the forties. But cultural history raises the question that baffled and intrigued the abstract expressionists: how does one begin and "finish" a work? How does one begin to establish the cultural milieu of the New York school? Why at 1920 rather than 1900, or the 1800s when the art of painting was crucially transformed and turned "modern"? As for being "finished," an aesthetic movement never comes to an end; it is the narrative about a movement that demands an ending. By 1960, Miss Ashton says, the momentum of the New York school was over; but something vague persisted—its myth. I find the term "myth" evasive here. What persisted and made its continuing momentum felt was a tradition, an aesthetic, a style; and if painters of the sixties repudiated abstract expressionism, they did so recognizing and needing its achieved presence. The development of art is a history of repudiations, but that does not mean that the art of a period has come to an end; it suggests rather a continuous tension between the established and the new which is the necessary condition for creativity. Miss Ashton herself has in a sense continued the story of the New York school in her essay on the sixties that will appear in a forthcoming book, *The Genius of American Painting,* edited by John Wilmerding. Here she describes how painters of the sixties repudiated the subjectivity, metaphysical concerns and nonobjective style of abstract expressionism—and strangely enough, I might add, these are exactly the elements that inform the literature of that decade. Writers like John Barth, William Gass and Donald Barthelme were obsessed with language as the

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painters had been with paint; viewed the literary work as an object, nonreferential and self-contained, as painters had their paintings; were solipsistic and concerned with private images, saw their stories and novels as not only projections of the self but as the creation of a self—as had the painters. All of this suggests—and it may be a subject worth developing—that cultural history is open-ended, but the form and formal decisions about Miss Ashton's book demand closure.

As cultural history, *The New York School* is neither a scholarly book nor a critical one. Its information is derivative and applies generally, not only to painters but to writers and musicians and to the American people. They were depressed by the depression; many were supported by New Deal projects, dismayed by fascism and embroiled in ideologies. Marxism, Freudianism, existentialism; dadaism, cubism, surrealism, futurism, expressionism; social realism and abstractionism: all these "isms" informed plays, novels and poems too numerous to mention. The depression and the war—those catastrophes—seemed, ironically, to benefit the New York painters, as Greenberg, Sandler and Miss Ashton herself have already pointed out. Federal aid through the Works Progress Administration allowed many painters, some for the first time, to devote themselves entirely to art. They were clearly being recognized as professionals, worthy of government support; this gave them morale as well as money. Being together, they formed a loose community, a "school," and achieved, finally, the dream of the lonely American artist to overcome his isolation. They were inspired by European artists also converging in New York in flight from fascism abroad: Hans Hofmann, the great teacher and exponent of the new; and later, Mondrian, Léger, Duchamp, Masson.

Thus the fortuities of political, intellectual and economic history seemed to create a milieu; but still unaccountable by cultural factors is the ineluctable mystery of genius. If Jackson Pollock is, as Greenberg claimed, "the best painter of a whole generation," he

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is so not because of the federal project nor Hofmann nor the New York *ambiance;* nor because of, in spite of, the personal tumult that B. H. Friedman describes in his biography of Pollock. As an American, his vision and energy may be related to the imponderable landscape of the West, where he grew up, as he says, impressed by "the vast horizontality of the land."

Perhaps this is the most unique element of the American painters' milieu—sheer space. In his brilliant book, *American Tradition in Painting,* John McCoubrey traces a generic visual image of American space as "shapeless void," "emptiness," that is reflected in the "total configuration" of the paintings of various abstract expressionists, particularly Pollock, de Kooning and Kline. McCoubrey's search for an American tradition leads him to be exclusive; Miss Ashton, on the other hand, is all-inclusive, ranging, and finally, I think, diffuse. Attempting to fit together bits of history, biography and art, she cannot avoid the effect of clutter; she cannot quite effect cohesion. *The New York School* is a mosaic of information, but a mosaic in which the pieces are discrete and scattered, their pattern not clearly defined. This is the hazard of cultural history, that it does not cohere.

I suspect that Miss Ashton has a certain ambivalence about what she is doing, for she sees herself scrutinizing "the components of fertilizer" in order to appreciate its "flower." Her metaphor of fertilizer and flower is disdainful—as Gaston Bachelard, from whom she takes it, intended—but not ill-chosen. It implies a common view she seems to share of American society as unnourishing to its artists, feeding them commercial manure. Those who flower in this unsuitable compost show remarkable hardiness, but many do not survive their native soil. The critic seems almost impelled to complaints that have become clichés: the American artist is alienated; stands alone against a puritanic, provincial and materialistic society; suffers its neglect and scorn, and fears its corruption. All this may be true, or merely a collection of unexamined truisms, but it is hardly exciting. What is exciting in the New York school story is the triumph—as Sandler called it—of American painting. The triumph is that abstract expressionism established American art as independently resourceful, as the frontier of modernism. It moved the avant-garde from Paris to New York. It fulfilled an American dream of liberation—and that is a story worth telling.

The Mind of a Man of Letters

BRIGHT BOOK OF LIFE: AMERICAN NOVELISTS AND STORYTELLERS FROM HEMINGWAY TO MAILER. *By Alfred Kazin. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $8.95.*

Reviewed by JOSEPHINE HENDIN

Alfred Kazin's *Bright Book of Life* is an extraordinary revelation of the mind of a man of letters who, for more than thirty years, has bridged the gap between the academy and the city with a critical style as immediate as life. But in bringing together the novelists and storytellers who have been at the center of contemporary life, Kazin has reached the special urgency of a critic at his height, coming to criticism, as freely as a writer to his novel, as the best available means of defining himself and his time. More personal than *On Native Grounds, Bright Book of Life* has the depth of Kazin's memoirs of his Brownsville boyhood spent locked in that immigrant, urban dreariness that was his family's state of mind:

> Lonely you were born and lonely you would die—you were lonely as a Jew and lonely in a strange land, lonely, always lonely even in the midst of people, for my family communicated with each other from loneliness to loneliness. . . . I read as if books would fill my every gap.

JOSEPHINE HENDIN's reviews have appeared in *Saturday Review,* the *New York Times Book Review, Modern Fiction Studies* and *Harper's Magazine.* She is the author of *The World of Flannery O'Connor* and is writing a book on current fiction.

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legitimize my strange quest for the American past, remedy my every flaw, let me in at last into the great world that was anything just out of Brownsville.

Bright Book of Life is shaped by Kazin's continuing idea of fiction as necessary magic, a force for self-transcendence. Certainly, what gives Kazin's insights their special power is his sense of the novel as the world transfigured in a single, often lonely mind, and his belief in the novelist as the supreme pilgrim through modern history, "superior," as D. H. Lawrence said, "to the saint, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog. The novel is the one bright book of life."

For Kazin, fiction is a means of mastering the human and natural environment. It is no accident that he writes so acutely of the "absolute identification of life with literature . . . that was the hallmark of the moderns and their *grande époque*," and of Hemingway as "the last great embodiment of the belief that experience can look entirely to literature for its ideal." Kazin has an unbeatable insight into style as a redemptive tool: "Hemingway's discovery of the story as a unit of narrative" achieved by the "fiercest elimination," the "fierceness of reduction," the loving enumeration of each detail, identified the "obsessive patterning of the smallest experience *with* the deliberate effort it takes to keep alive." Hemingway's aesthetic success was a victory over his private demons as well as a triumph over what Hemingway called "the shapelessness, the panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history." Kazin points out that the Great War "was a lost generation's greatest chance." For in Hemingway's mind that war was stylized into the timeless confrontation between self and death. Facing the "unmistakable" adversary, "a man could rise to heroism just as he rose to a clear knowledge of the odds against him in a well-defined, godless universe." Kazin sees Hemingway's suicide as the "last perfect objective correlative" for the fall from clarity and confidence. As Kazin puts it: "Hemingway died of Faulkner as much as he died of Hemingway." Faulkner's fame rose as Hemingway's declined, and Kazin writes: "Faulkner was another name for a world that could not be reduced to a style."

Kazin gets into the work of writers whose differences suggest the many varieties of American experience with a sensitivity that turns his critical narrative into an absorbing, social, aesthetic and moral document —a virtual history of *qualities,* of the changing styles of imagination over the last fifty years. Through it all Kazin prizes fiction's power to put reality in perspective. He has a consistent admiration for writers whose imagination is directed toward getting beyond isolated experience, or whose very act of writing is a means of getting beyond the narrow particular of themselves. In "The Secret of the South" on Carson McCullers:

> "The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter" comes alive still not only as a virtuoso performance dramatically engaging so many hard solitudes, but as a novel of depressed Thirties. . . . McCullers' myth-making power was to fit this obsessive loneliness into . . . the southern climate, the town in summer, the doldrums of children with nowhere to go. She made many different lacks equal illuminations of the system of life in a southern town. . . . Even McCullers' concentration on absolute clarity of style . . . produces distinctness as a tragic effect.

On Saul Bellow in "The Earthly City of the Jews":

> Bellow was intimate with the heights-and-abyss experience of so many intellectual Jews, the alternating experience of humiliation and paradise in the same Jewish head. . . . Despite all the crisis psychology in *The Victim, Seize the Day, Herzog,* there was a burning belief in commanding one's own experience, in putting it right by thought. Each of these narratives was a kind of survival kit. . . .

Kazin's most effective chapters are those in which his belief in fiction as a force for transcendence is tested against his own awareness that our literature is increasingly one of private voices speaking of narrow, limiting experience. The imagination that guides this kind of fiction is less tran-

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scendent or inventive than directed toward exploring states of social or psychological confinement. Kazin writes "The Decline of War," "Cassandras," "The Imagination of Fact" with a wariness of the power of dailiness, of fact, to pull the imagination into *it*. These chapters add up to an anguished, if occasionally exasperated, vision of fiction and us, caught in our time and chewed up by the content and force of our experience. Kazin points out that among other things Vietnam has shaped the new war novel into a chronicle of vulnerability.

In "Cassandras": "The sense of *mankind's* vulnerability in this age gives a special resonance to all personal testimony by gifted women writers." Of Sylvia Plath: "The astonishing, precisely memorable thing about her work is its total lovelessness toward the 'world'—it could not even distract her from her fixation on her fate—and her practiced literary use of it for effect. It was as if she robbed an orchard of its most colorful fruit without eating any."

On the nonfiction novel: "Subject, the situation, the accident, the raid, the murder is so primary in these novelized special cases that the only force apparently able to do justice to extreme experiences is the writer's myth of himself as an agent for change. . . . But the nonfiction novel exists in order *not* to change the American situation that makes possible so much literary aggression against it." While Kazin may admire his novels, he does not enjoy the writer who needs the world to be no wider than the latest catastrophe. It is his dislike for the mind that he feels relishes how bad it all is that is at the heart of his most arguable essay, "The Absurd as a Contemporary Style."

Absurdity as manners, transmissible, teachable as wedding etiquette, is the object of Kazin's best invective. He puts himself on the line and, in doing so, right in the center of the fiction that comes from what he calls "our age of derision." The organization of this chapter is absolutely startling—Kazin goes from black writers like Ellison to black humorists (Joseph Heller, Leonard Michaels, Lenny Bruce,

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Norman Mailer, et al.) and black commedians (William Burroughs, Donald Barthelme, Thomas Pynchon, et al.), linking them as social satirists. The second group forms a "generation" of white, middle-class intellectual writers who have not experienced social or racial oppression, but who "feel dislocated in the country they used to take for granted," who now find so much of America "meaningless," and who have cultivated the habit of "studiously never loving anything in sight." In fine set pieces on Barthelme, Burroughs, and Pynchon, Kazin's admiration for good novels wins out over his irascible declaration that "meaninglessness is an intellectual conceit in all senses of the word; it is not something that one lives." To believe otherwise is presumably, for Kazin, to shrink the idea of the absurd to something as small as "social frustration": "Unlike the Europeans who invented the term because they have a quarrel with existence, ours have merely realized the limitations of our own power." But to say this is to shrink the idea of meaninglessness to something as small as sour grapes.

At least some of the writers whom Kazin dismisses—notably John Barth—never had as a subject the "system" or even a system of "social frustrations," but write instead about emotion. They are not quarreling with life or death so much as trying to feel nothing about either, and using meaninglessness conceptually and emotionally as part of an exacting defense. Outrageous as the organization of this chapter seems, and quirky as Kazin is in it, it manages to be finally brilliant in its ability to put writers as familiar as Donald Barthelme, Norman Mailer and Thomas Pynchon in fresh perspective, and to provoke whoever reads it into the pitch of Kazin's own dialogue with fiction.

What breaks through Kazin's critical narrative are the high emotional loyalties that turn *Bright Book of Life* into something beyond literary history. Kazin's allegiance is to fiction as the nexus of intelligence and sensibility, that absolute openness of imagination that turns life into the experience of multiple realities. What

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Kazin writes of Nabokov is true of himself: "Fiction is his reality, not time recaptured, but the sought-for thing in itself; fiction was the anti-world that could take one out of exile." It is the "patterning" of life, death and personality that attracts Kazin to Nabokov; it is the clarity and force of Kazin's insight into those patterns and his total commitment to fiction that make *Bright Book of Life* the most exciting critical book in years.

Arbiters of Authenticity

THE SEDUCTION OF THE SPIRIT: THE USES AND MISUSES OF PEOPLE'S RELIGION. *By Harvey Cox. Simon & Schuster. $8.95.*

Reviewed by JAMES HITCHCOCK

Harvey Cox, perhaps the most popular theologian currently writing in America, is an informative case study of the advantages and disadvantages of "trendiness," a hazard of our culture that seems to affect practically all disciplines. The advantage of being self-consciously *au courant* is that it does introduce new questions and forces specialists to grapple with problems they might prefer to avoid. The disadvantage, which on the whole seems more weighty, is that much energy is dissipated on questions that turn out to be of only ephemeral significance, and even these are often dealt with in shallow and merely fashionable ways.

For nearly ten years Professor Cox has kept busy sprinting from each new "central question" to the next, sometimes openly rejecting his earlier positions (as he has now repudiated much of his most influential book, *The Secular City*), always exerting himself manfully to stay abreast of a culture that changes with bewildering rapidity and often seems to double back upon itself.

✪ JAMES HITCHCOCK appears twice in this issue of the SCHOLAR. His article, "The Evolution of the American Catholic Left," begins on page 66.

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Having discovered modern secularism and then put it behind him, having rediscovered the importance of myth and ritual *(Feast of Fools)*, he now undertakes to investigate "people's religion"—piety as it is actually practiced by ordinary people, as distinct from official church teachings. His new book is loosely autobiographical, and among other things, he seeks to rediscover and reaffirm the roots of his own Baptist heritage. He rejects the "gnostic" elitism of the educated who believe in "pure" religion but are embarrassed by its concrete manifestations.

Since the book deals with a great range of subjects, it is difficult to summarize adequately. The constant theme, however, can perhaps be stated somewhat as follows: Modern society, through its political and economic institutions, the mass media, and even its schools and churches, ceaselessly tries to force conformity and standardization on people. Nothing that is unique, personal, concrete, passionate, genuinely folksy, or "useless" is allowed to stand. Inexorably life is flattened out and made uniform; practicality and the need for organization and control govern everything.

It is hardly a new thesis, and it has been stated better by numerous other social analysts. Professor Cox's distinctive twist is to find a major hope for counteracting this in what he regards as the authentic (as distinct from merely institutional) manifestations of religion—myths and legends, popular cults, rituals, whatever appears spontaneous and in touch with primeval roots. Through rediscovering these, and through learning how to use them properly, men can begin to resist the power of large organizations and protect their psyches from manipulative invasion.

In theory it is an intriguing idea, and one that probably has merit. In practice, however, Professor Cox turns out to be, in the well-known phrase, more a part of the problem than of the solution. In the first place, "people's religion" is mainly those cultural phenomena that are currently fashionable among the American intelligentsia —Asiatic religions, the encounter movement and Esalen, new cities, Latin American peasant religion, Marxism, deliberate fantasizing and playmaking, the theater of the absurd, science fiction and cryonics (freezing dead bodies in the hope of eventual resuscitation). There is a conventional analysis of the dangers of technology and a McLuhanesque analysis of oral versus print culture.

This list, which could be much longer, does more than simply demonstrate that the author is in touch with the newest and brightest ideas. It demonstrates also that, for him as for many intellectuals, reality does not exist unless it has been officially noticed and validated by the ultimate arbiters of culture. Since *The Secular City* (1965), Professor Cox has "discovered" realities that have been around for a long time and that other people have long been aware of. That he has ostensibly become more comprehensive in his sympathies is to the good. He has not, however, renounced his right to arbitrate what in popular culture is "authentic" and what is not.

Unlike Robert Coles, whose work with black sharecroppers, poor whites or Spanish-Americans always permits glimpses of them in their uniqueness and idiosyncrasy, Harvey Cox undertakes always to interpret alien cultures for the use of American sophisticates. Whatever cannot be used is either ignored or discarded. Traditional religious myths and rituals are appropriated, but it is obvious that the professor does not believe in them as the natives do. A Mexican bishop is praised for making the doctrine of Mary's Assumption politically relevant, but Cox notices approvingly that the bishop has read the demythologizing Northern European theologians. The Baptist from Harvard undertakes to arbitrate between "good" Marian devotions (the Assumption, properly understood) and "bad" (Our Lady of Fatima—too connected with anticommunism). He decides which Greek Orthodox Easter rites are useable and which are outmoded, what in Asiatic spirituality is needed and what might be "escapist."

Ultimately his claim, nowhere made explicit, is that he understands the religious traditions of the world better than their

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own adherents. Thus the pope is said to have been right in proclaiming the dogma of the Assumption but "for the wrong reasons." The Greek Orthodox Church may be the spiritual home that troubled Christians are looking for, but first Professor Cox insists that it "must change drastically" and "give up" some of its most cherished characteristics. He treasures a blessing bestowed by a Ukrainian bishop but thinks he understands its true meaning in a way the bishop probably does not. Those who stubbornly cling to their own versions of their beliefs he is likely to dismiss as "curial hacks," or with other terms of contempt.

All this might be tolerated as harmless egotism, or the occupational disease of intellectuals, were it not for the crucial problem that Professor Cox himself states early in the book. All over the world (including America), people are experiencing anxiety and insecurity over the erosion of values, customs, beliefs and life-styles that are central to their own identities but that the society appears determined to undermine. Some of this is indeed the work of the mass media, the government and the private corporations. Much of it also, however, is the work of missionaries of cultural change like Professor Cox, who have little real respect for the forms of popular life and through the universities, the theological schools and pulpits, and the more sophisticated media (for example, the newsmagazines and the most prestigious newspapers) strive mightily to change them.

Professor Cox lines up, for example, among the severest critics of conventional family life, yet there is no more important, albeit temporarily hidden, issue in American society today. The massive reaction of the electorate against the perceived apostles of cultural revolution stems mainly from their sense that the family is threatened in many ways and that it is one of the few sacred touchstones left in our society. Those who wish to alter it, or who wish (as Professor Cox also does) to see traditional Christianity come to an end, may have persuasive arguments. They cannot, however, pretend that they are trying to save the people from manipulation.

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The Reader Replies

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—EDITOR

In my review of Ford Madox Ford's *Return to Yesterday* for the Autumn, 1973 SCHOLAR, I indicate (incorrectly, it now seems) that the members of "the James group" were "mutually generous." To recount the steps that led me to this belief would be too complicated a process. But subsequent research—most notably the fifth and final volume of Leon Edel's biography, *Henry James, The Master*—leads me to the opinion that "the group" was not so close-knit as I had heretofore believed. On this matter, the following quotation from Edel seems best to sum up the personal and professional attitude of the four: "As a fellow worker each novelist respected the sacrosanct hours of the others; and above all those of James. He was older and looked upon with awe; and he kept them at a distance, save when he was ready to receive them."

Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of a literary historian it is helpful to consider these four writers as a group; they associated with each other personally and professionally, they generally admired each other's work (James, of course, did not live to see the publication of Ford's best writing), and they shared a belief in impressionism as the supreme artistic technique.

JAMES J. KIRSCHKE
Associate Editor
Journal of Modern Literature

* * *

Last spring I wrote you a cranky letter about a piece in the Winter issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. Now comes the time for healing and friendly words.

The Summer issue has had me entranced. From the heavy going in Daniel Bell's "Technology, Nature and Society," through several of the companion pieces, I have been blowing kisses in the general direction of Phi Beta Kappa, you as editor, and especially those writers who have so effectively stirred my synapses.

Although I earn my living in the McLuhan world of television, and he shares guru status with Robert Ardrey (*Territorial Imperative*) and Daniel Moynihan in my pantheon, I find reading such as you provided this summer amply justifies print.

ED WEGENER
Auburn University
Auburn, Alabama

* * *

Daniel Bell's scholarly article, "Technology, Nature and Society," made me think about the disparity between our knowledge of space and time and the everyday approach to these subjects. Copernicus was born five hundred years ago, but our thinking and actions are the same as if he, Galileo, Kepler, Newton and more modern astronomers had never lived. We talk and act as though the Ptolemaic system of two thousand years ago is a reality.

Terra firma still exists for us, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, the stars sweep across the heavens in orderly fashion both seasonally and diurnally. We no longer believe that the heavenly bodies are pushed by angels, but that is our only concession to the heliocentric theory. Obviously, we believe and act on the things that we see, not on the tremendous advances in our knowledge of the universe. In spite of all the scientific discussions and the evidence we have acquired from moon walks and space demonstrations we are still a "flat-earth" people for all practical purposes.

GEORGE MEADE
New Orleans, Louisiana

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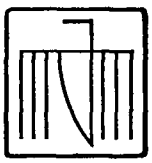

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